

The Benefits of Legalising Organ Trade

So what's wrong with organ trade? Remember, willing seller, willing buyer. That's capitalism and the market at work. That's Adam Smith talking to us from the grave, baby.

Should we be careful about legalising organ trade?

Yes. Especially when the guy is a hobbit and the kidney is kind of small. Students of anatomy

(who can be found together with the Tasmanian Tiger, small pox virus and the SMA Guideline on Fees) will remember that the kidney measures 1 by 3 by 5 inches, weighs 7 ounces, and is sited between the 9th and 11th rib¹. This is complete rubbish when it comes to halflings. Our kidneys only weigh 3.5 ounces which sort of explains why we pee half the time. So remember: no hobbit kidneys, no dwarf kidneys and gosh, most definitely no orc kidneys (orc piss really smells).

So baby, if you can afford it, it has to be human kidneys. Elvish ain't too bad – elves are admittedly a bit anal, but they're not too renal.

Seriously, the Hobbit thinks that there are many benefits and spin-offs to legalising human (not halfling) organ trade. Think about it, it will be great for our efforts to make Singapore a medical hub. The slogan "Uniquely Singapore" will now truly be unique. Uniquely Singapore – where you can get a kidney for the price of a designer handbag. We can of course tell the rich folks to come to Singapore and visit the IR in Sentosa, sail around One Marina, ride the Singapore Flyer, attend the Night F1, and so on. But all that is passé and can be



duplicated by other cities. Singapore is different – you can now come to Singapore and return home with a kidney or two legally. (Why stop at one kidney? For the truly rich, have two. It's always good to have one spare hanging around, the immune-suppressant drug cost is the same.)

And after that, pee-wee from your brand new kidney

into our loos and contribute to our NEWater efforts. You can't get more unique than that. And every June, we can even throw in an organ trade element into our Great Singapore Sale! The whole country can have a party off all this peri-nephric fat.

Our research will also get a shot in the arm. Foreign transplant talent will rush to our shores because we have the organs for them to work on. They will develop transplant expertise that is truly groundbreaking. You don't need to pay mountains of dough to get these foreign talents here. With the organs and the patients, they will automatically come.

Furthermore, this transplant business will spin off a whole lot of employment and commercial activity hitherto not possible. We will have a whole industry of middlemen in the organ trade. Instead of convenience stalls, flower shops and curry puff outlets in the retail area of our hospitals, we can also have organ trading outlets specialising in organ trade. Patients can just go in and browse profiles of the organ sellers and decide on an organ they fancy. Think about it, we can invite leading auctioneers like Christie's to come and set up shop in Singapore

and start organ auctions. eBay may likewise do a roaring business, and may even set up regional HQs here.

We can bundle organ trade-related investments with private banking services so that the private bankers here can serve even more clients. After all, the guy who can buy a kidney or a lobe of liver is the same guy who can afford private banking. Can you imagine what this will do to the prime area property market? Who needs container terminals and wafer fabrication foundries? All we need are organ sellers and buyers to spur economic growth. The possibilities are endless. Just to make sure all the money doesn't really go to the sellers (why do they need 16 years of wages? From the living conditions they come from, their life expectancy may not even be 10 years, let alone 16), we can institute an Organ COE (Certificate of Entitlement) so that our public coffers can be suitably enriched, in addition to the GST buyers will have to pay anyway. And remember, since there are no SMA Guideline on Fees anymore on anything, any price goes, as long as the seller and buyer agree on a price. In the free market, a kidney can be worth 50 cents or 5 million bucks, so having an Organ COE is crucial in making sure more than a few benefit from organ trade.

Even the public sector gains. First, our public sector surgeons don't have to go to prison early in the morning to harvest death row kidneys anymore. Although the prata is good, is it really worth the surgeon's while to wake up that early? We will also have to set up a statutory board to regulate organ trade which will provide employment for many scholars and administrators, and this will in turn provide more employment for secretaries and cleaning ladies; not to mention the glossy annual reports this commission will publish. All this is positive economic activity that contributes to our GDP growth.

While we are at it, since we are legalising organ trade, we should then also legalise baby trade. After all, a baby is just a collection of organs and if we can trade an organ or two, surely babies are also acceptable. The baby trade could also spin-off a whole new industry. Demand for our hotels and serviced apartments from these expectant mothers and their clients would keep our hoteliers happy; not to mention our obstetricians who now have to fight for work and get a slice of an ever diminishing pie if we can seal the deal before birth.

Basically, the healthcare and hospitality industries would undergo dramatic growth. Our

private hospitals would be filled with transplant work and baby trade work. And then we don't have to worry if paying \$5,000 for one square foot of clinic space or a billion bucks for hospital land will pay off or not. We can even wean some of our colleagues off aesthetic medicine. It will be a brave new world.

So where do we go from here? The first thing of course is to change how we train our medical students. First, we have to tell them that while all life is precious, some lives are more precious than others. As long as the seller agrees to the price offered by the buyer, we will do the transplant for a procedure fee. We should respect free market forces where a kidney can be worth less than a handbag or wristwatch the buyer is carrying or wearing.

Picture this in a ward round: The consultant takes a group of 22-year-olds on a bedside tutorial. The consultant asks the group to select a case to present and a medical student presents the case: "Bed 14, Mr ABC, a 25-year-old farmer from Country X who has sold his kidney to 60-year-old Mr DEF for \$28,000. Mr ABC is now admitted for pre-op workout together with Mr DEF in Bed 8. Consent has been obtained and op is listed for tomorrow." In the next tutorial, the same clinical group presents the same case in the ward – Mr ABC is now DIL and suffering from sepsis post-op. The consultant keeps a professionally detached demeanour throughout these tutorials, and teaches our medical students that organ trade is an accepted part of life in our society.

As you can see, to effect legal organ trade in our society, we have to change the value system in our medical schools first where we (used to) teach the sanctity of life over price tags. But that should not be too difficult. Because values don't come with price tags, values should be worthless.

Afterall, the market must prevail. What would Adam Smith, the father of market economics and author of *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) say? The Hobbit doesn't know. But it may be useful to note that Adam Smith was actually a professor of moral philosophy in the University of Glasgow. He considered his earlier work *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) to be a superior work to *The Wealth of Nations*. Maybe he got it all wrong.

A 3.5 oz kidney for \$35,000, anyone? ■

Note:

1. Real students of anatomy will know this refers to the spleen and not the kidney.