

TUESDAY 29 MAY 2012

**THE DAY**  
 EXPLAINING MATTERS

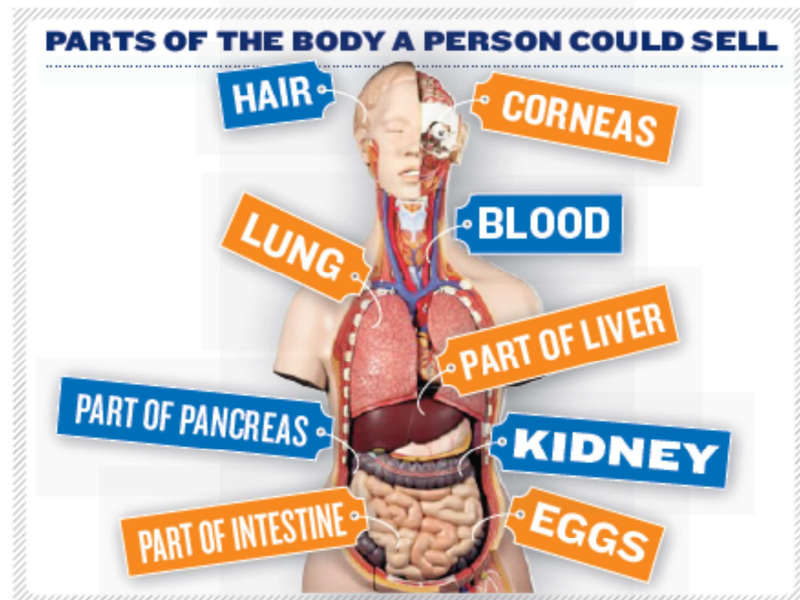
WWW.THEDAY.CO.UK

# One organ sold every hour in illegal trade

Investigators from the World Health Organisation have uncovered a huge black market in human organs. Most are kidneys, sold to criminals by poor and desperate people in the developing world.



PSHE  
HISTORY & POLITICS  
BUSINESS & ECONOMICS



**H**ow much would you charge for one of your kidneys? For Aliaksei Yafimau, a 30-year-old TV engineer from Belarus, the answer was just £6,000. The money, he thought, would be a first step out of poverty and towards a better life.

In return, he had to give up one of his internal organs. All humans have two working kidneys – small bean-shaped organs in the lower back that scrub waste out of the bloodstream so that it can be excreted through the urinary tract. Yafimau thought he could get by on just one.

When conducted in hospital, by trained surgeons, kidney donation is a very safe operation. Almost all donors survive perfectly well on a single kidney.

But Yafimau's operation was performed not by doctors but by criminals. He was flown to Ecuador and locked in a hotel room for a month, under armed guard. When he tried to get out of the deal, his family were threatened. Finally, the

organ traders cut him open and pulled out his kidney so that it could be sold to a wealthy woman with advanced kidney failure. She will have paid up to £100,000.

Why would anyone pay so much for an organ? Because, for more than a million people around the world, a new kidney is the difference between life and death. There are around 40,000 people in the UK and half a million in the US suffering from end-stage kidney failure – and numbers are skyrocketing.

These people need kidney transplants to survive – but there are far too few donors to go around. Most people in Britain and the US still refuse to give away their organs after death, sometimes for religious or ethical reasons. And few people would willingly donate a kidney while alive – especially since it is illegal in most countries to pay for organs.

The consequence is that many people

turn to the black market. According to newly published research from the World Health Organisation, there are 11,000 illegal organ trades every year – more than one per hour. Doctors may not be able to find a spare kidney, but criminals often can.

## TWO SOLUTIONS

This trade in black market organs ruins lives. But how to stop it? Most people say better enforcement is the answer. Poor countries must do more to prevent illegal operations being carried out inside their borders. And rich countries must do more to prevent people buying illegal organs.

There is another possible solution. Some people say selling kidneys should not be banned but legalised. For very poor people, selling a kidney will always be an attractive option. At least if it was legal, they would get proper medical care and a proper financial reward. And, there would be more organs available for transplants.



## Q & A

**Q** £6,000 is a lot of money. Why isn't everyone selling their kidneys?

**A** Mainly because it's a very very bad idea. An illegal operation is very dangerous, and the long term health effects of losing a kidney without proper care can be unpleasant. People who have traded their kidneys

almost always regret their decision in the end. One young man in China sold his kidney for an iPad 2. Now his health is deteriorating – and his iPad 2 has been made obsolete by the iPad 3.

**Q** Is there any way of stopping the trade?

**A** It would help if more people were registered organ donors. People with donor cards automatically give permission for

their organs to be donated when they die, saving as many as eight lives.



## SOME PEOPLE SAY...

'I would never give away part of my body, whatever the circumstances.'

WHAT DO YOU THINK?