



## THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER

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RELEASE

### **New Guidelines Expose Breakdown in Shared Understanding of Brain Death**

**BROOMALL, Pa., April 11, 2024**—Today the National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC) is releasing a statement, "[Integrity in the Determination of Brain Death: Recent Challenges and Next Steps](#)," to draw attention to recent events that should give rise to grave concerns and to call for Catholic leaders in medicine, health care delivery, and academe to bring clarity and consistency to key issues surrounding brain death, especially when a patient is listed as an organ donor. The events in question involve a failure to appropriately resolve an important inconsistency between clinical, legal, and ethical standards regarding the declaration of brain death.

While the concept of brain death has been widely accepted in principle since the late-1960s, significant questions about its precise nature still remain. And important questions have been raised over the years about whether tests for brain death have been applied with sufficient care and consistency in the care of individual patients.

Organ transplantation has extended the lives of thousands of people. Yet this endeavor has been based on a consensus—and for Catholics, on consistent Church teachings—that vital organs, including hearts, lungs, and livers, may only be taken after a patient is dead. There must be moral certitude of death, particularly when the diagnosis is as complex as brain death.

John Brehany, executive vice president and director of institutional relations at the NCBC, stated: "The failure to resolve an important inconsistency between clinical, legal, and ethical standards for brain death has revealed an emerging breakdown in the public consensus on death and organ donation which, if not addressed, will undermine respect for the sanctity of human life and support for organ transplantation. It is essential that Catholics in medicine, health care delivery, and academe help to bring clarity and consistency at this critical time."

**The National Catholic Bioethics Center** provides education, guidance, and resources to the Church and society to uphold the dignity of the human person in health care and biomedical research, thereby sharing in the ministry of Jesus Christ and his Church. The NCBC envisions a world in which the integral understanding of the human person underlying Catholic teaching on respect for human life and dignity is better understood and more widely embraced in America and worldwide. More information can be found at [ncbcenter.org](http://ncbcenter.org).