

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXVIII, Number 32, 4 March 1994 — Professor researches unethical organ use [ARTICLE]

# Professor researches unethical organ use

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David Rothman, professor of history and social medicine at Columbia and director of the Center for the Study of Society and Medicine at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, is currently investigating the ethical questions surrounding organ procurement practices in several South American, Asian and Middle Eastern countries.

Rothman's research concentrates on Brazil, Egypt, India, Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan. He said he believes these countries are violating donors' human rights in an effort to obtain the large number of organs needed for transplants.

Rothman said common practices include using prison inmates as organ donors and allowing the sale of organs.

"The thing I've gotten into the most is the use of executed prisoners as sources for organs, which is going on in China and Taiwan," Rothman said.

"My concern is that the poor and prisoners in these countries are being used as a source for organs to serve the privileged. Medical advances shouldn't be used to exploit the disadvantaged," Rothman said

in a statement.

Rothman has been meeting with transplant and human rights committees and foreign journalists in an effort to document the human rights violations, and is collecting evidence from medical publications, newspaper accounts, legislation, and interviews with former prison inmates, organ donors, and organ recipients.

Human Rights Watch, a New York-based organization that monitors the human rights practices of governments and attacks on individuals who defend human rights in their own countries, is assisting Rothman in the research.

According to Sidney Jones, Executive Director of Human Rights

Watch/Asia, Rothman has previously studied AIDS babies in Romania, prison conditions in India and has worked at Africa Watch in Africa.

"Our role is tiny. It's a question of his touching base with us and using our resources. All the contacts were [Rothman's]. He's got a greater range of sources than we could ever hope to have," Jones said.

"I think this project will [lead towards] greater cooperation between the medical and human rights communities," he added.

Rothman's two-year project began in September 1993, and is being funded by \$70,000 in grants from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and the J. Roderick MacArthur Foundation. The research will conclude with an international conference to be held in the summer or fall of 1995, which will address Rothman's findings and devise strategies to address these

issues.

“We will bring in leading representatives of major transplant and medical societies, international health organizations, as well as those with expertise in human rights,” Rothman said.

Rothman also plans to write a book describing his research.

Jones said Rothman’s work is likely to have long-term repercussions.

“I think I probably have never heard a grizzlier presentation as the one [Rothman] gave about these conditions,” Jones said. “If my reaction is similar to the reaction of the public, I think a major international campaign will be mounted as a result of his efforts.”

Rothman’s study is funded by \$70,000 from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and the J. Roderick MacArthur Foundation. These foundations are known for their work with human rights and disadvantaged populations.