**JAPANESE GANGSTER GETS LIVER TRANSPLANT WHILE HUNDREDS OF AMERICANS ON THE WAITING LIST DIE**

**WESTWOOD -- Law enforcement sources told The Times that UCLA Medical Center and its most accomplished liver surgeon provided a life-saving transplant to one of Japan's most powerful gang bosses.

In addition, a knowledgeable law enforcement official who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the surgeon performed liver transplants at UCLA on three other men who are now barred from entering the United States because of their criminal records or suspected affiliation with Japanese organized crime groups.

The four surgeries were done between 2000 and 2004 at a time of pronounced organ scarcity. In each of those years, more than 100 patients died awaiting liver transplants in the Greater Los Angeles region.

According to another person familiar with the matter who also spoke on condition of anonymity, the surgeon in each case was Dr. Ronald W. Busuttil, executive chairman of UCLA's surgery department. Busuttil is a world-renowned liver surgeon who co-edited a leading text on liver transplantation and is one of the highest-paid employees in the University of California system.

There is no evidence that UCLA or Busuttil knew at the time of the transplants that any of the patients had ties to Japanese gangs, commonly called yakuza. Both said in statements that they do not make moral judgments about patients and treat them based on their medical need.**

**MY QUESTION IS, WHILE HUNDREDS OF AMERICANS DIED, WHY WAS THE “MEDICAL NEED” OF THIS MAN FROM JAPAN GREATER THAN OUR OWN CITIZENS. JAPAN IS AN ADVANCED NATION. WHY COULDN’T HE GET IT THERE?

U.S. transplant rules do not prohibit hospitals from performing transplants on either foreign patients or those with criminal histories.

Several current and former law enforcement officials said the most prominent transplant recipient, Tadamasa Goto, had been barred from entering the U.S. because of his criminal history. Goto leads a gang called the Goto-gumi, which experts describe as vindictive and at times brutal.**

**Jim Stern, a retired chief of the FBI's Asian criminal enterprise unit in Washington, said the FBI helped Goto obtain a visa to enter the United States in 2001 in exchange for leads on potentially illegal activity in this country by Japanese criminal gangs.

Stern said that Goto got his liver, but provided the bureau with little useful information on Japanese gangs.

Stern said, "I don't think Goto gave the bureau anything of significance. Goto came to the States and got a liver and was laughing back to where he came from. . . . It defies logic."

Although Stern was not involved with the deal, he said he learned the details when he became unit chief in 2004 and continues to be troubled by what happened.

The first law enforcement official, who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and therefore requested anonymity, said that after the transplant, Goto was again barred from reentering the U.S.**

**But Goto continued to receive medical care from Busuttil in Japan. Goto's Tokyo-based lawyer, Yoshiyuki Maki said that the doctor traveled there and examined Goto on more than one occasion, and evaluated Goto while he was in custody in 2006.

Maki said that Busuttil's medical opinion was cited in a successful court petition to have Goto released for medical care at a Tokyo hospital.

The Times is not naming the other three transplant recipients in this article because neither they nor their lawyers could be reached.

Several transplant experts and bioethicists contacted by The Times said they were troubled by the transplants, especially because organs are in such short supply in this country. U.S. transplant statistics show that In the year of Goto's surgery, 186 people in the Los Angeles region died waiting for a liver.

Some, but not all, of the experts said a transplant center has an obligation to determine whether a patient would be a worthy custodian of an organ and to protect potential donors' faith in the system.**

 **Arthur Caplan, a bioethicist at the University of Pennsylvania said "If you want to destroy public support for organ donation on the part of Americans, you'd be hard pressed to think of a practice that would be better suited".

In a statement, the UCLA Health System said it could not comment on specific cases because of federal patient privacy laws. Generally, it said it complies with all the rules and regulations of the United Network for Organ Sharing, the federal contractor charged with ensuring the safety and fairness of the U.S. transplant system. Last year, UCLA performed more liver transplants than any other U.S. hospital.

The statement said "UCLA’s processes for evaluating a patient -- both for mental and physical suitability for organ transplants -- are the same regardless of whether the individual is a U.S. citizen or a foreign national".

Hospitals and doctors in the U.S. have the final say on which patients get added to their waiting lists and have the discretion to refuse patients with unhealthy lifestyles that could compromise the transplant's success. Patients may be refused on other grounds as well, including an inability to pay.

At the time of Goto's 2001 transplant, liver allocations were made based on both a patient's medical status and waiting time. Since 2002, livers have been allocated to patients based almost entirely on how sick they are.

It is unclear when Goto joined UCLA's waiting list. He had been in the United States two months when he received a new liver. National transplant statistics show that overall, 34% of the patients added to UCLA's liver waiting list between January 1999 and December 2001 received a new liver within three years of being listed.

Busuttil, a former president of the American Society of Transplant Surgeons who has testified before Congress on who should receive priority for transplants, released his own statement this week. He did not directly address the transplants of the Japanese patients but said in part:

"As a surgeon, it is not my role to pass moral judgment on the patients who seek my care. . . . If one of my patients, domestic or international, were in a situation that could be life-threatening, of course I would do everything in my power to assure that they would receive proper care.
"I consider that to be part of my responsibility and obligation as a physician."

On May 18, 2001, Tadamasa Goto boarded Japan Airlines Flight 0062 at Narita International Airport, bound for Los Angeles with his son Masato.

Goto, now 65, had hepatitis C and was worried it would develop into cancer, Maki, Goto's lawyer, said in an interview last week in his Tokyo office. Because Japan has an extreme shortage of organ donors, many sick patients feel they need to go abroad to seek treatment.**

**(SINCE JAPAN HAS AN EXTREME SHORTAGE, HE COMES TO AMERICA WHERE THERE IS ALSO AN EXTREME SHORTAGE, BUT IS GIVEN A LIVER THAT COULD HAVE SAVED ANOTHER’S LIFE. AND WE ARE TO BELIEVE THAT THIS DECISION WAS ONLY BASED ON MEDICAL NEED? IT SOUNDS TO ME LIKE THOSE 186 AMERICANS WHO DIED THAT YEAR HAD A PRETTY SERIOUS MEDICAL NEED.)

Stern said, “The FBI did not help Goto arrange his surgery with UCLA but did help him gain entry to this country.” The agency had long been frustrated by the reluctance of Japanese law enforcement to share information on yakuza members in the United States.

David Kaplan, a journalist who co-wrote the book "Yakuza: Japan's Criminal Underworld" said, "For American law enforcement, it's been like pulling teeth to get criminal intelligence from Japanese authorities."
In his book, Kaplan describes Goto's gang, the Goto-gumi, as an offshoot of the largest Japanese organized crime group, the Yamaguchi-gumi. In an interview, Kaplan said Goto is "a serious player in the yakuza. His gang is known for being particularly ruthless and violent."

According to a story in the Japan Times, a senior member of the group and an affiliated gang member were sentenced to prison for the 1992 slashing of a Japanese director whose film portrayed the yakuza as violent thugs. Goto was not personally implicated in the case.**

**WELL THEY CERTAINLY PROVED THAT FILM MAKER WRONG.

Maki said, “Goto underwent a successful transplant in July 2001. He received the liver of a young man who died in a traffic accident. Goto is over 60 now, but his liver is young."**

 **Several years after the transplant, in May 2006, Goto was arrested in Japan on suspicion of real estate fraud.

Maki said he and other lawyers worried that their client was not well enough to be interrogated. In addition to his liver problem, Goto was suffering from heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes.

Maki said “The lawyers asked that Goto be released immediately, but authorities rejected the request.” He said the lawyers asked that Goto be given his medication at precise times, but that did not happen either. "Goto lost his appetite, had a terrible headache, scratched his arm until it started to get infected, and he was throwing up."**

**ARE THERE ANY LISTENERS OUT THERE SHEDDING A TEAR?**

**IF THERE ARE, I WILL FIND YOU!**

**Maki used the interview to vent against Japanese prosecutors, saying he believes they were attempting to exploit his client's poor health to obtain a conviction on what Maki considered groundless charges.

He said Busuttil, along with doctors from Tokyo University Hospital and Showa University Hospital in Tokyo, examined Goto and recommended that he be released for outside medical treatment.

On May 24, 2006, some 16 days after he was arrested, the court temporarily released Goto and he entered the hospital.

Goto was acquitted of the charges in March of this year.

Maki said, "The UCLA doctor [Busuttil] examined Goto during his detention and again one week after he received his not-guilty ruling."

The law enforcement official who spoke on condition of anonymity said Goto's criminal history includes prison time. But Maki said that his client's last conviction was three decades ago, for assault, and that his previous convictions were as a youth.

Court records in Japan are kept by prosecutors who generally do not share them with anyone not party to a case.

Jake Adelstein, a former reporter at Japan's largest daily newspaper, Yomiuri Shimbun, said he received a tip about the circumstances surrounding Goto's liver transplant in 2005. Within days of making inquiries, however, Adelstein was visited by men who told him: "Erase the story or be erased."

Adelstein did not pursue the story but mentioned the incident in a recent opinion piece in the Washington Post. He said he would elaborate on it in a forthcoming book.**

**Dealing with scandals**

**Word of the surgeries at UCLA comes as the U.S. transplant system is slowly recovering from scandals that forced the closure of three transplant programs in California. Officials there have acknowledged that in one of those, St. Vincent Medical Center in Los Angeles moved a Saudi national up a liver waiting list, bypassing dozens of others, and then covered it up by falsifying paperwork.

Overseers of the U.S. transplant system say they are unaware of other cases in which hospitals have provided organs to foreign criminals. But some hospitals, including Stanford University Medical Center, have performed transplants on U.S. prisoners -- often controversial because taxpayers foot the bill.

According to the ethics committee of the United Network for Organ Sharing, "one's status as a prisoner should not preclude them from consideration for a transplant."

The network encourages transplant programs to give foreign recipients less than 5% of organs from deceased donors each year, but that is not a hard-and-fast rule. At one point, in the 1980s, the threshold was 10%, but it was lowered after Congress considered banning transplants for foreign nationals entirely.**

**AND WHY DO YOU THINK CONGRESS “ONLY” CONSIDERED IT?**

**FOR THE SAME REASON THAT DOCTORS MOVE THESE GUYS UP THE LIST: MR. “GREEN”.

Centers that exceed the 5% guideline are asked for an explanation in writing, but none has been sanctioned publicly. In 2001, the year Goto received his transplant, UCLA slightly exceeded the guideline.

Typically, transplant experts say, foreigners cannot receive transplants at U.S. centers unless they are willing to pay the full cost of the procedure out of pocket -- without the substantial discounts given to insurers. According to an April report by Milliman Inc., an actuarial firm, charges for a liver transplant and immediate follow-up care generally exceed $523,000,**

**It could not be determined how much UCLA and Busuttil were paid for the Japanese transplants.

Tom Mone, chief executive of OneLegacy, the group responsible for procuring and distributing organs in much of Southern California, said transplants for foreign criminals are "an unfortunate result of a system that's magnanimous to the world."

Mone also said hospitals do not have the resources to investigate their patients. "The enforcement should be at the borders, not at the hospital."

Transplant statistics show that in recent years, nonresident foreign nationals have accounted for less than 1% of all transplant recipients nationwide.

Dr. Mark Fox, associate director of the Oklahoma Bioethics Center, said the UCLA transplants may create pressure to eliminate transplants for foreign nationals entirely, which Fox said he does not support.

Dr. Fox said, "For some people, there are misgivings for transplanting foreign nationals at all. For some people, there are misgivings about transplanting criminals at all." When you put those two together, it is certainly reasonable to expect that a certain portion of the population would say, 'This is not what I expected when I signed my donor card.' "**

**I DON’T KNOW ABOUT ALL OF YOU OUT THERE, BUT I AM THOROUGHLY DISGUSTED. I KNOW THIS HAS ALWAYS BE GOING ON (REMEMBER MICKEY MANTLE?). BUT WHEN WILL SOMEONE HAVE THE COURAGE AND MORALS TO PUT A STOP TO THIS PRACTICE?**

**Bart Kosko 1960-present**

**He is a writer and professor of electrical engineering at the** [**University of Southern California**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Southern_California) **(USC). He is a leading researcher and popularizer of** [**fuzzy logic**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fuzzy_logic)**,** [**neural networks**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neural_network)**, and** [**noise**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noise)**, and author of several trade books and textbooks on these and related subjects of** [**machine intelligence**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artificial_intelligence)**.**

**Kosko holds degrees in philosophy, economics, mathematics, electrical engineering, and law. He is an attorney licensed in California and federal court, and worked part-time as a law clerk for the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office. He started his career in music composition, and is an award-winning composer. He’s not even 50 years old yet and has already achieved more than most large families do in a lifetime.**

**His essay “In Defense of God” is so powerful that I plan to use it as the subject of one of my shows in the near future.**

**“Death is an engineering problem.”**

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**Baruch Spinoza 1632-1677 44 years**

**He was a** [**Dutch**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands)[**philosopher**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy) **of** [**Portuguese Jewish**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iberian_Jews) **origin.**

**Today, he is considered one of the great** [**rationalists**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationalism) **of** [**17th-century philosophy**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/17th-century_philosophy)**, laying the groundwork for the** [**18th-century**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/18th-century)[**Enlightenment**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment) **and modern** [**biblical criticism**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_criticism)**.**

**Spinoza lived quietly as a** [**lens**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lens_%28optics%29) **grinder, turning down rewards and honors throughout his life, including prestigious teaching positions, and gave his family inheritance to his sister. Spinoza's moral character and philosophical accomplishments prompted** [**20th-century**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/20th-century) **philosopher** [**Gilles Deleuze**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilles_Deleuze) **to name him "the absolute philosopher." Spinoza died in February 1677 of a lung illness, perhaps** [**tuberculosis**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuberculosis) **or** [**silicosis**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silicosis) **caused by fine** [**glass**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass) **dust inhaled while tending to his trade.**

**Spinoza became known in the Jewish community for positions contrary to normative Jewish belief, with critical positions towards the** [**Talmud**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talmud) **and other religious texts. In the summer of 1656, he was issued the writ of** [**cherem**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherem) **(Hebrew: חרם, a kind of** [**excommunication**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Excommunication)**) from the Jewish community, perhaps for the** [**apostasy**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostasy) **of how he conceived** [**God**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God)**, although the reason is not stated in the cherem. Righteous indignation on the part of the synagogue elders at Spinoza's heresies was probably not the sole cause for the excommunication; there was also the practical concern that his ideas, which disagree equally well with the orthodoxies of other religions as with Judaism, would not sit well with the Christian leaders of** [**Amsterdam**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amsterdam) **and would reflect badly on the whole Jewish community, endangering the limited freedoms that the Jews had already achieved in that city. It was never revoked.**

**After his cherem, it is reported that Spinoza lived and worked in the school of** [**Franciscus van den Enden**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franciscus_van_den_Enden)**, who taught him Latin in his youth and may have introduced him to modern philosophy, although Spinoza never mentions Van den Enden anywhere in his books or letters. Van den Enden was a** [**Cartesian**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cartesian_dualism) **and** [**atheist**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheist) **who was forbidden by the city government to propagate his doctrines publicly. Spinoza, having dedicated himself completely to philosophy after 1656, fervently desired to change the world through establishing a clandestine philosophical sect. Because of public censure this was only eventually realized after his death through the dedicated intercession of his friends.**

**THIS EXPLAINS WHY ATHEISTS SEEMED NON-EXISTANT BEFORE THE ENLIGHTENMENT. IT WASN’T BECAUSE THERE WERE NO ATHEISTS. IT WAS BECAUSE YOUR LIFE, AND PROBABLY THAT OF THE FAMILY THAT DEPENDED UPON YOU, WAS IN GREAT JEOPARDY. TOLERATION HAS NEVER BEEN A HALLMARK OF CHRISTIANITY. EVEN LESS SO FOR ISLAM. ONLY IN MODERN HISTORY HAS PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY GRANTED TOLERATION TO THOSE OF DISSENTING VIEWS. FUNDAMENTALISTS STILL DO NOT.**

**When the public reactions to the anonymously published Theologico-Political Treatise were extremely unfavourable to his brand of Cartesianism, Spinoza was compelled to abstain from publishing more of his works.**

**IT’S A GOOD THING HE KNEW ENOUGH TO PUBLISH ANONYMOUSLY. THIS EXPLAINS WHY THERE IS ALMOST NO ATHEIST LITERATURE TO BE FOUND BEFORE THE ENLIGHTENMENT. HERESY AND BLASPHEMY CARRY THE PENALTY OF DEATH. THESE LAWS STILL EXIST IN THE MUSLIM WORLD AND THEY ARE ENFORCED; AS THE WORLD SAW WHEN THE DANISH CARTOONIST WAS EXECUTED FOR TRYING TO EXERCISE HIS RIGHT OF FREE SPEECH IN HIS OWN COUNTRY.**

**WHEN EINSTEIN WAS ONCE ASKED ABOUT HIS BELIEF IN GOD, HE ANSWERED “I BELIEVE IN SPINOZA’S GOD.” (THAT ISN’T JEHOVAH).**

**Spinoza never married, nor did he father any children. When he died, he was considered a heathen anti-religionist by the general population.**

**WELL, I WOULD SAY THAT THE GENERAL POPULATION GOT IT RIGHT.**

**I WOULD ONLY ADD THAT IT IS SOMETHING TO BE PROUD, NOT ASHAMED OF.**

**"The only difference between a human being and a stone rolling down a hill**

**is that the human being thinks he is in control of his own destiny."**