

Cash-strapped sell their kidneys to pay off debts

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British victims of the credit crunch are offering to sell their kidneys for £25,000 or more to help pay debts, an investigation by The Sunday Times has revealed.

At least a dozen adverts have appeared on the internet offering kidneys for sale from British "donors". Five of the sellers corresponded with undercover journalists, who posed as friends and relatives of sick patients to negotiate sales.

One person willing to sell a kidney is a 26-year-old mental health nurse who said he needed the money to pay debts after a business he set up went bankrupt. Another is a 43-year-old taxi driver from Lancashire, who wants to raise cash to pay off some of his mortgage and buy a new kitchen.

Both men said they wanted to help those in need of kidney transplants at the same time as relieving their financial difficulties. A leading doctor said the phenomenon highlighted the need for a public discussion of the issue of selling organs.

Professor Peter Friend, a former president of the British Transplant Society, said: "The West has outlawed it for all sorts of good reasons, but the result is it goes underground. It is really important to have a debate." Nearly 7,000 people in the UK are waiting for kidney transplants and 300 died last year while on the waiting list.

Offering to sell an organ in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is an offence under the Human Tissue Act even if the seller is planning to travel to another country for the transplant operation.

Yesterday William Henderson, the taxi driver, justified his offer to sell a kidney by saying: "I thought I was going to give another man a chance of life. I wanted to help myself at the same time. We are in the middle of a giant credit crunch." He added: "A guy from Pakistan wanted one, but I turned him down. I think he was more buying it to sell it on. I'd rather . . . it's got somewhere good to go."

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/health/article6850879.ece