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# Revolutionizing Organ Donation With Blockchain Technology: Prospects and Challenges In Healthcare

Momaya Vedant Jayesh*[1], BM Zeeshan Hameed[2,3], Kinju Adhikari[4], Mayukh Das[5], Ali Talyshinskii[6], Nithesh Naik[2,7], Bhaskar K Somani[8], Piotr Chlosta[9], and Bhavan Prasad Rai[10]

[1]Department of Electronics and Instrumentation, Manipal Institute of Technology, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, Karnataka, India 576104
[2]iTRUE (International Training and Research in Uro-oncology and Endourology) Group, Manipal, Karnataka, India 576104
[3]Department of Urology, Father Muller Medical College, Mangalore, Karnataka, India 575002
[4]HCG Cancer Centre, Bangalore 560027, Karnataka, India
[5]Department of Aeronautical and Automobile Engineering, Manipal Institute of Technology, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, Karnataka, India 576104
[6]Department of Urology, Astana Medical University, Astana, Kazakhstan 020000
[7]Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, Manipal Institute of Technology, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, Karnataka, India 576104
[8]Department of Urology, University Hospital Southampton NHS Trust, Southampton, UK SO166YD
[9]Department of Urology, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Kraków, Poland 30060
[10]Department of Urology, Freeman Hospital, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK NE77DN

**Abstract**

Amidst a critical shortage in organ donations, with over 120,000 individuals on the waiting list compared to a mere 8,000 annual donors, blockchain technology emerges as a beacon of innovation for the organ donation ecosystem. Originally the bedrock of cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, blockchain has since traversed beyond the financial sector, exhibiting potential for securing medical records, authenticating pharmaceuticals, and mitigating fraudulent practices within healthcare. It presents a decentralized ledger that not only ensures data integrity and immutability but also fosters transparent and efficient donor-recipient matching through smart contracts. Despite the promising applications, the adoption of blockchain in healthcare confronts challenges including interoperability, data security, and regulatory hurdles. The present article encapsulates the transformative impact of blockchain, particularly within organ transplantation, and underscores the necessity for further research to surmount the barriers to its implementation. As blockchain technology continues to evolve, its capacity to reconcile the demand-supply disparity in organ donations is anticipated to save numerous lives, revolutionizing the healthcare landscape.

***Keywords:*** Organ Transplant Waiting List; Blockchain Technology In Healthcare; Illegal Organ Trade; Healthcare Data Management; Smart Contracts In Organ Donation

*Corresponding author: momaya.mitmpl2022@learner.manipal.edu
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# 1 Introduction

Currently, there are over 120,000 individuals on the national transplant waiting list, while the annual number of organ donors is approximately 8,000. This vast gap between the demand for and supply of organs indicates a critical need for innovative solutions to address the disparity [1–3]. The advent of blockchain technology, known primarily for the Bitcoin cryptocurrency introduced by Satoshi Nakamoto, has heralded a myriad of applications beyond its original financial purpose [4]. Researchers have explored blockchain for various uses such as medical record management, counterfeit drug detection, and fraud prevention [5–7]. A blockchain functions as a digital ledger, cataloging cryptocurrency transactions in a verifiable and permanent manner. It grows with each "completed" block that contains a cryptographic hash of the prior block, a timestamp, and transaction data. This structure enables Bitcoin nodes to confirm valid transactions and prevent the double-spending of coins [8, 9]. The pressing issue of illegal organ trade, driven by high demand and exacerbated by poverty, provides a compelling case for blockchain's potential in regulating and tracking organ donations [10, 11]. The Government of India's national agency, NOTTO, is tasked with overseeing the country's organ supply to ensure accurate recording of transplants and organ donations, as well as implementing necessary measures for transplant requests [12, 13]. The healthcare sector faces significant challenges, including interoperability, the inaccessibility of medical records, and the lack of comprehensive, secure population health data. Recent public health crises have further highlighted the existing healthcare system's interoperability deficiencies [14, 15]. The present article encapsulates the transformative impact of blockchain, particularly within organ transplantation, and underscores the necessity for further research to surmount the barriers to its implementation. Refer to Figure 1 for a visual representation of the potential use of blockchain in the organ donation process.

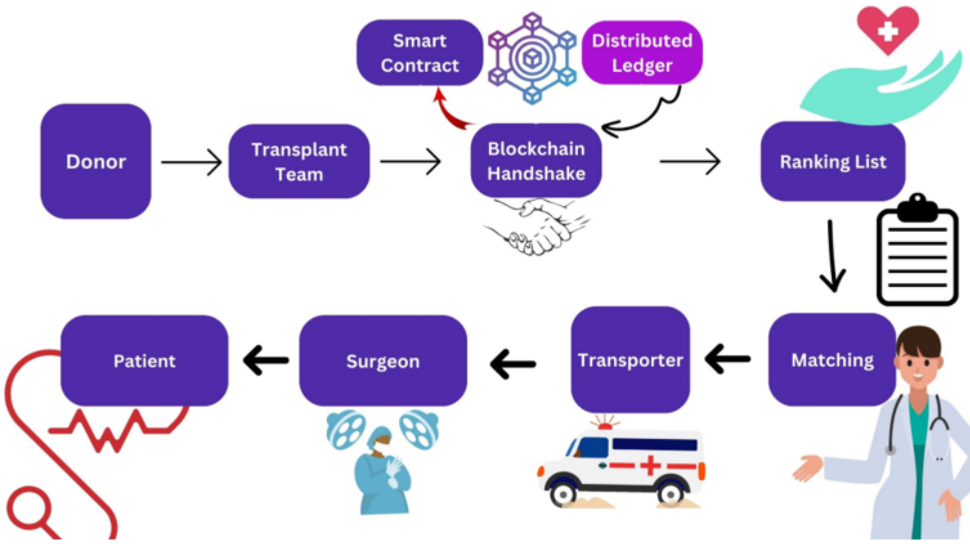


Figure 1: Using blockchain for organ donation flowchart.

# 2 Blockchain Technology

Blockchain technology, introduced in 2008 by an individual or group under the pseudonym "Satoshi Nakamoto," revolutionized digital transaction processes [16, 17]. Nakamoto's seminal white paper presented Bitcoin, a novel electronic cash system operating on a decentralized network that verifies and records transactions. A blockchain serves as a decentralized digital ledger, recording transactions across multiple computers. This ensures that any alteration of recorded data without network consensus is virtually impossible. Originally developed for Bitcoin, blockchain technology's potential extends to various domains, including supply chain management, voting systems, and real estate record-keeping. Its inherent security and distributed computing architecture afford high Byzantine fault tolerance. Blockchain's decentralized consensus makes it ideal for applications in event recording, medical records, and other records management activities such as identity management, transaction processing, provenance documentation, and food traceability [18–21]. A blockchain operates by grouping data into blocks, which are then linked in a chronological chain. New blocks are appended through a process known as "mining," involving network participants competing to solve complex mathematical problems. This process secures the blockchain and maintains the integrity of its data [22, 23, 22]. In the healthcare sector, as summarized in Table 1, blockchain technology offers numerous benefits such as enhanced security, privacy, and interoperability. It confronts challenges like managing massive healthcare data and access complexities. Furthermore, blockchain facilitates automated data exchange and tracking in healthcare through smart contracts. Table 2 delineates the key metrics in optimizing kidney donation using blockchain technology. It includes parameters such as the number of kidney donations per year, reduction in the waiting list, use of smart contracts, data security measures, and patient and donor satisfaction rates.

Moreover, a comparison between traditional and blockchain-enabled organ donation processes is presented in Table 3. This comparison highlights significant improvements in aspects such as verification of organ donors, documentation of organ agreements, privacy protection, and overall impact on patient care.

Table 1: Blockchain Technology in Healthcare Summary

| **Topic** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| Introduction | Blockchain, introduced in 2008, underpins Bitcoin. |
| Definition | A decentralized and secure digital ledger. |
| Applications | Diverse sectors including supply chain, voting, healthcare. |
| Benefits | Offers enhanced security, privacy, and interoperability. |
| Challenges | Involves management of massive healthcare data and access complexities. |
| Smart Contracts | Facilitates automated data exchange and tracking in healthcare. |

Table 2: Key Metrics in Optimizing Kidney Donation with Blockchain

| **Particulars** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| Number of Kidney Donations (Year) | Total number of donations facilitated by blockchain. |
| Waiting List Reduction (%) | Reduction percentage in the transplant waiting list post-blockchain implementation. |
| Smart Contracts Utilized | Number of contracts used for donation agreements and tracking. |
| Data Security Measures | Blockchain features for data security, such as encryption and decentralization. |
| Privacy Protection | Enhancement of patient privacy via blockchain. |
| Administrative Efficiency | Reduction in administrative tasks owing to blockchain integration. |
| Transparency and Traceability | Improved transparency and traceability in donation processes. |
| Medication and Product Authentication | Ensures authenticity of medicines and medical products. |
| Patient and Donor Satisfaction (%) | Satisfaction rate among patients and donors with the blockchain process. |

Table 3: Comparison of Traditional vs. Blockchain-Enabled Organ Donation Processes

| **Aspect** | **Traditional Process** | **Blockchain-Enabled Process** |
|---|---|---|
| Verification of Organ Donors | Manual, often time-consuming | Streamlined through smart contracts |
| Documentation of Organ Agreements | Prone to errors, paper-based | Digitally secured with smart contracts |
| Donor-Recipient Matching | Manual, subject to delays | Automated, efficient, and real-time |
| Storage of Medical Information | Centralized, risk of data breaches | Decentralized, enhancing security |
| Privacy Protection | Limited data privacy control | Augmented privacy via encryption |
| Transparency and Traceability | Limited process transparency | Complete transparency with a public ledger |
| Administrative Burden | High due to manual overheads | Significantly reduced workload |
| Data Exchange and Interoperability | Often limited | Enhanced through smart contracts |
| Impact on Patient Care | Potential for delays and errors | Streamlined processes improving care |

## 3 Pertinent Healthcare Subjects and Blockchain Alternatives

The U.S. healthcare sector, recognized as the world's largest, incurs annual expenditures surpassing $1.7 trillion [24, 25]. The average annual healthcare cost per capita in the United States is approximately $10,739, which is higher than in any other country. The healthcare sector's share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is about 18%. Projections indicate that, without significant changes, healthcare will constitute nearly 20% of the U.S. GDP by 2027 [26]. In response to escalating medical and pharmaceutical costs and the aim to improve the quality of care, the healthcare industry is exploring and implementing innovative strategies [27]. A key issue in the healthcare system is the misalignment of objectives among various stakeholders, including healthcare providers, insurance companies, and patients. This misalignment often results in fragmented care and inefficiencies. Effective collaboration, open communication, and transparent procedures are essential to address these conflicts. However, the handling and communication of data within this complex environment pose significant challenges.

These challenges include the need for efficient information flow, process auditing, and the high costs associated with these activities, which often slow down healthcare service delivery. Governments and insurance providers, as critical stakeholders, are working with healthcare professionals to develop and implement policies. Blockchain technology presents numerous advantages in this context, particularly for data integrity and accurate transaction recording, beginning with Blockchain-enabled Universal Patient Record Linkages (UPRL) [28]. Healthcare systems, along with payers, regulators, and government bodies, face technological challenges in managing the vast amounts of data collected. These challenges encompass data structure, security, standards, storage and transfer, governance, ownership, error management, and the need for real-time analytics [29–31]. Blockchain technology's dual verification process promises to offer potential solutions to these challenges. The key mechanisms of blockchain, whether private or public, would help establish a secure and verifiable environment for data transfer [32–34]. The adoption of blockchain-based services in healthcare could lead to reduced response times and lower administrative costs by minimizing paperwork. This efficiency gain allows healthcare professionals, including doctors and nurses, to focus more on patient care and engage in innovative practices that could improve patient outcomes. Additionally, a comprehensive tracking system within a Blockchain-enabled network ensures the authenticity of medicines and medical products, thereby enhancing confidence among all stakeholders [35–37]. The potential study must outline a real-time, distributed solution for optimizing the organ donation process using blockchain technology. This process shall start with a donor signing a smart contract for organ donation, followed by a recipient submitting a transplant request. A licensed medical professional then shall validate and hash these documents, creating a validated mismatching pair that would be then broadcasted across the network. Once a match gets identified, it shall be sent to a doctor for approval. Following the doctor's approval, a hash shall be generated, and the verified matched pair can be added to the blockchain, rendering it immutable. This streamlined process shall provide all necessary information for surgical logistics planning to doctors and medical specialists.

## 4 Challenges in Data Collection

Wearables and other healthcare monitoring technologies generate an enormous amount of data on a person's health. Proper data management and secure data retrieval are crucial for our healthcare system to make data-driven decisions. Routine business operations and service delivery of our current healthcare system also produce data. Patients interact with various healthcare professionals throughout their lives, leaving a trail of data in each one's system. The primary data stewardship often lies with providers, leading to fragmented data trails and diminished patient access. Healthcare data is characterized by its vast volume, variability, and velocity. It is non-uniform, encompasses numerous variables, and necessitates real-time data processing. Much of this data is inaccessible, non-standardized across systems, and challenging to comprehend, use, and share due to [38, 39]:

- Dependency on the dialogue between the patient and the doctor.
- Consistent failure to leverage the data effectively.
- Lengthy and time-consuming healthcare processes.
- Critical patient data being scattered across systems.
- The inability of many healthcare systems to provide essential care due to lack of access to crucial data.
- A negative impact on the management system due to many participants lacking the expertise for seamless procedures.
- Inadequate security and reliability of healthcare data.

Blockchain could provide numerous benefits for identity management and healthcare data security [40]. It can reduce threats and protect sensitive information from falling into the wrong hands. When data is uploaded to the blockchain, it is encrypted and becomes immutable and difficult to decode. It verifies transactions using a secret identifying key known only to the user. Hence, a healthcare professional would have explicit access to the blockchain record to retrieve a patient's medical data, unlike with current healthcare data technologies [41, 42]. Improved data collaboration between providers leads to more accurate diagnoses and more effective treatments, enabling healthcare institutions to deliver care more economically. Blockchain can keep data secure and private while allowing patients to share their information with any chosen service providers. It delineates the ownership of medical records and ensures the validity of anti-counterfeiting measures [43, 44].

## 5 Data Exchange and Interoperability

Smart contracts enable the automation and monitoring of specific state changes in healthcare data management. When new data is received, an automatic notification is sent to the relevant party, allowing them to review the record before either accepting or rejecting it [45].

This mechanism ensures that all participants are kept informed and actively engaged in the progression of the record. Generally, contracts are categorized into three types: contract types, health tracking information, and procedures and storage [46].

### 5.1 Doctor Smart Contract

The doctor smart contract is designed to maintain various essential details about the doctor, including a list of patients they have consulted. This contract allows transactions related to different procedures to be conducted on the smart contracts of only those patients who are listed as having been consulted by the doctor [45, 47].

### 5.2 Patient Smart Contract

The patient smart contract focuses on enhancing privacy by excluding personal details such as names and addresses. Each patient is assigned a unique identity generated by hashing their username and Social Security Number (SSN) using the MD5 algorithm. This contract serves as a robust mechanism for authentication and authorization, permitting only authorized doctors to modify the patient's contract status through transactions [48, 49]. Additionally, this smart contract provides information about the patient's status in the organ donation process. It stores only content identifiers of the patient's medical information, rather than the complete files. These identifiers serve as references to access documents on the distributed file system, InterPlanetary File System (IPFS). The patient's smart contract also manages and monitors access requests to the medical records [50, 51]. As outlined in Table 4, blockchain technology in healthcare data management offers multiple benefits. These include ensuring data integrity, securing data retrieval, improving collaboration, enhancing privacy, increasing administrative efficiency, authenticating medications and products, and automating and monitoring state changes in healthcare data.

Table 4: Benefits of Blockchain Technology in Healthcare Data Management

| **Benefit** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| Data Integrity | Ensures the accuracy and reliability of healthcare data through immutable records. |
| Secure Data Retrieval | Facilitates secure and efficient access to patient records, thereby reducing the risk of data breaches. |
| Improved Collaboration | Enhances the sharing of medical information among healthcare providers. |
| Privacy Enhancement | Protects patient privacy and ensures data security through encryption and decentralization. |
| Administrative Efficiency | Streamlines processes and reduces paperwork, leading to lower administrative burdens. |
| Medication and Product Authentication | Employs a comprehensive tracking system to verify the authenticity of medicines and medical products. |
| Automation and State Monitoring | Utilizes smart contracts to automate and monitor changes in healthcare data states. |

## 6 Conclusion

The nascent stages of blockchain implementation in the healthcare domain have underscored the imperative for a paradigm shift in the dynamics among healthcare providers, patients, and the pharmaceutical industry. While the transformative potential of blockchain is palpable, its integration into healthcare necessitates the navigation of a labyrinth of legal, regulatory, and technology-specific challenges. The promise of blockchain to revolutionize the healthcare system is yet to be fully realized, with its application still burgeoning and largely exploratory. Currently, the healthcare sector has not extensively harnessed blockchain, but the trajectory indicates a burgeoning expansion of its applications. The dearth of empirical studies on blockchain's impact in healthcare signals an urgent need for rigorous research, particularly real-world case studies, to elucidate the technology's efficacy and scope. Future investigations are essential to forge a path forward, paving the way for informed, evidence-based adoption of blockchain in healthcare practices.


## Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declares that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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# Author Contribution

**Jaspreet Kaur**: Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing- Reviewing and Editing, Project Administration; **Rohit Agnihotri**: Methodology, Data curation, Investigation, Software, Validation; Writing–Original draft preparation.

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