

Raising the profile of organ donation with the next generation of health practitioners

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ORGAN DONATION IN CONTEXT

Organ transplantation is one of the greatest success stories of modern day medicine; it saves lives and it transforms lives. However, it is estimated that an average of three people die every day through lack of a suitable donor organ, whilst an untold number of patients never even get onto the transplant waiting lists – not through lack of possible benefit but because there is no realistic prospect of them ever receiving the offer.

The gap between the number of people in the United Kingdom (UK) waiting for an organ transplant and the number of deceased donors has widened year on year over the last decade. Thus, whilst there has been an almost 50% increase in the number of people awaiting a life-saving organ transplant over this time, the number of people whose wishes are to donate after their death, and who are being identified and honoured has remained essentially static.

Whilst it is unlikely there will ever be enough deceased organ donors to match the rising incidence of end stage renal failure, it is the knowledge that donation rates elsewhere in the world are so very much better than our own that remains the real driver for change. Thus, if countries are compared using the measure of deceased donors per million of population per year, UK rates of donation are seen to be amongst the lowest of any developed nation and well below those reported from many parts of mainland Europe and North America.

The many recommendations by the Organ Donation Task Force concern issues at a national level, however their focus is in acute hospitals, in particular by changing both the approach that hospital staff have to donation and also by influencing the willingness of society to respond favourably. Only in this way will donation rates improve. Establishing Organ Donation Committees within hospitals will play a crucial role in responding to this need and change. See organ donation committee reports for Chairs by NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) for further details on the state of organ donation.

UHMBFT ORGAN DONATION COMMITTEE

The committee consists of senior staff from intensive care, emergency medicine, paediatrics, as well as representatives from tissue services, operating theatre, and palliative care. The committee also has a chair, who is not an employee of UHMBFT, as well as the clinical lead for organ donation, and the specialist nurse for organ donation.

The committee meets quarterly, and has the authority to make and implement decisions on donation policy and practice ensuring full consultation with clinical and management staff as integral to the implementation process. The Donation Committee reports to the Board through the Clinical Audit and Effectiveness sub-committee of the Clinical Quality and Safety Committee and the Medical Director.

THE PURPOSE OF THE COMMITTEE

In line with the recommendations made by NHSBT

Organ Donation Task Force, UHMBFT Organ Donation Committee has the following three purposes:

- To influence policy and practice in order to ensure that organ donation is considered in all appropriate situations. To identify and resolve any obstacles to this objective.
- To ensure that a discussion about donation features in all end of life care, wherever located and wherever appropriate, recognising and respecting the wishes of individuals.
- To maximise the overall number of organs donated, through better support to potential donors and their families.

THE NEED TO WORK WITH THE NEXT GENERATION

The committee has identified the opportunity to have student representation on the committee from those currently undertaking nursing and medical training at local universities. The roles of the student representatives are:

- To actively participate in organ donation committee meetings.
- To identify opportunities for nursing and medical students to contribute to discussions relating to organ donation at a local and national level.
- To feedback to nursing and medical students on organ donation policy and practice developments at a local and national level.

INTRODUCING THE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

Applications were shortlisted by Dr Fiona Macmillan and Sr Lindsay Pinch, and interviewed by Dr Mark Wilkinson, Clinical Lead for Organ Donation at RLI, and Sr Sarah Ralley, Specialist Nurse for Organ Donation. As part of the application process, students were asked why they wanted to apply for the role, how it would relate to their future careers, and how they would contribute to the work of the committee.

Congratulations to Zoe Butler (2nd year nursing student, University of Cumbria) and Oyin Alabi (5th year medical student, Lancaster Medical School (LMS)) on being appointed the student representatives for the committee. Zoe has worked with the team in Kendal to establish that as the first 'organ donation town', and Oyin has recently completed her Masters in Medical Ethics and Law at Manchester University. They will head up a newly formed subgroup of the committee involving Ben Watkins (2nd year medical student, LMS), Tanvir Grewal (3rd year medical student, LMS), and Lauren Gowland (4th year medical student, LMS).

Over the coming 12 months, the students hope to widen awareness of organ donation, with a particular focus on encouraging people to sign up to the organ donation register and for these potential donors to inform their families of their decision.