

PE1453/D

Andrew Howlett
Assistant Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Mr Howlett,

Ref: Consideration of Petition PE 1453

I am writing in response to your letter dated 13 December 2012, to provide views on behalf of NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) to the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee petition "*An opt-out system of organ donation in Scotland*".

NHS Blood and Transplant is the UK organ donation and transplantation organisation and is responsible for raising awareness of the need for more donors; managing the NHS Organ Donor Register (ODR - a database of 18.7m who have signed up to donate organs after their death); working in partnership with UK-wide hospitals to ensure that opportunities for donation are identified and progressed; employing Specialist Nurses for Organ Donation (SNODs) in hospitals to discuss donation with family members; and retrieving and allocating donated organs.

Our role includes working with the UK Health Departments to implement the policies they set. We are currently working closely with the Welsh Government on its opt-out / deemed consent legislation and will work within whichever legal and policy framework is introduced by each of the four UK Health Departments. If the Scottish Government were to introduce a system of opt-out, NHSBT would highlight that operating multiple/varying opt-out systems in different parts of the UK would be likely to cause confusion for the public and considerable operational challenges.

- **What previous approaches have proved to be successful, or unsuccessful, in increasing levels of organ donation?**

Unfortunately there is no single, simple and effective way to increase organ donation. NHSBT takes a broad approach to this challenge encompassing increasing public awareness, ensuring better understanding, changing public attitudes, overcoming perceived religious and cultural barriers, more effective working in hospitals and better approaches to families in appropriate settings; the ODR is an important aspect but just one of what is a multi-faceted approach.

Over the last few years a great deal of progress has been made both across the UK and specifically in Scotland. There were 86 deceased donors in

Scotland in 2012, and 63 living donors. This is the largest overall total ever, the largest deceased donor number ever, and the second largest number of living donors.

The number of people on the ODR in Scotland at the end of December stood at 2,111,529 – over 41% of the population compared with c.31% average across the UK. This demonstrates the success of awareness campaigns in Scotland.

The latest rates of family authorisation for donation to proceed (measured through the Potential Donor Audit – PDA) for Scotland are 51.1% for donation after circulatory death (DCD) and 78.3% for donation after brain death (DBD) (this information is taken from our 2011/12 Activity Report, a more up to date figure is not yet available). The Scottish DBD rate is consistent with the best performing countries.

For the last four years NHSBT has been working closely with UK Health Departments to implement the recommendations of the Organ Donation Taskforce. These included national awareness campaigns, establishing donation committees in each NHS Board, bringing SNODs into NHSBT employment and providing comprehensive training, and establishing Clinical Leads for Organ Donation (CLODs).

UK-wide we are close to meeting the target for a 50% increase in the number of donations from 2008, with Scotland having already reached this target. We are in the process of developing a strategy to take organ donation to 2020. The final strategy will be published in April but previous drafts have included action on a number of areas.

- **What steps are currently being taken, or considered, to increase levels of organ donation?**

A key action will be to increase the number of people who authorise organ donation in life. This will be achieved through public engagement and working organ donation into the school curriculum. We will particularly work with Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities to increase understanding of the importance of donation in those communities.

To increase the number of people who donate organs after they die NHSBT will work with clinicians and regulators to improve compliance with relevant regulations and guidelines, particularly with regard to brain stem death testing and donor identification and optimisation.

It is important that donation services are individualised and responsive to hospitals' needs. Better use will be made of existing data to allow hospitals to benchmark their performance against the best performers, outcomes will also be published from listing as well as transplantation.

Where a person has expressed a desire to donate their organs, families will be asked for help to support their relative's dying wish. There will also be increased training for professionals who work with families to facilitate organ donation, as well as for staff in the wider organ donation profession.

In order to establish a consistent approach to organ utilisation guidance will be provided on levels of acceptable risk in relation to donated organs to support surgeons in appropriate risk taking.

As outlined above it is NHSBT's role to implement the policies which are set by UK Health Departments as deemed appropriate for those areas. It is our view that given the complexities around organ donation and transplantation, not least that very few people die in the circumstances where they can become a donor, the approach to increasing donation rates should be multi-faceted with a focus on the donation pathway to ensure that every possible opportunity for donation is identified and progressed.

We do not believe that opt-out alone will necessarily increase donation rates but we support any approach which helps to raise awareness of the need for more donors and encourages the public to make a decision and discuss their donation wishes with family members.

Yours sincerely

Sally Johnson
Director of Organ Donation and Transplantation
NHS Blood and Transplant