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Assistant Clerk to the Public Petitions
Committee
Via email
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Your Ref
Our Ref BM/CD/PE1448

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Dear Mr Howlett

RESPONSE TO PETITION PE1453 REGARDING THE INTRODUCTION OF AN OPT-OUT SYSTEM OF ORGAN DONATION IN SCOTLAND.

This response has been provided on behalf of NHS Fife with input from Dr Martin F Clark, (clinical lead for organ donation NHS Fife).

With regard to the specific questions posed by the public petitions committee:

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

Organ donation in Scotland has over the last few years been a real Scottish success story with organ donation rates meeting the 50% increase target set by the government a year early. This has been achieved by a combination of political drive from the top and adequate funding to allow these targets to be achieved. Specifically the development of organ donation champions in every Board (Clinical leads for organ donation) who can enthuse local staff, troubleshoot barriers to organ donation and develop organ donation pathways in their local hospital.

The specialist nurses in organ donation are perhaps the most valuable resource in organ donation at present and are invaluable in managing the organ donation process from first contact to family follow up. In concert with the CLOD's they raise the profile of organ donation within their region and drive change forward.

National campaigns both government funded (kill Jill, have a chat about organ donation etc.) and newspaper run, such as the Sun's recent series on organ donation have also increased organ donation registrations and public awareness of organ donation. As has increasing the opportunities to consider registering on the Organ Donor Register i.e. now having the option to join when applying / renewing your driving licence.



The biggest increase in organ donation in recent years has come from donation after cardiac death and this has gone in just a few years from being an exotic novelty to normal medical practice. It cannot be stated how big a shift in mainstream medical opinion has had to be achieved to make this practice acceptable and again credit should be given to CL-OD's and SN-OD's for achieving this. As the rate of brain death donation is essentially static it is through increasing donation after cardiac death that the best chance of increasing organ donation lies.

As regards unsuccessful approaches it must be stated, although I accept that this is highly controversial, that currently too many healthy organs across the UK are not transplanted due to a fear of failure by the transplanting units. The rate of cardiac transplantation is very low and the general feeling of most CLOD's is that good hearts go unused. I have heard of several instances when hearts refused by UK transplant surgeons as unsuitable are subsequently transplanted successfully into European recipients.

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

Within Scotland we feel that this question would best be addressed by NHSBT but the following will no doubt be included in their answer; the Category II donation pilot in Edinburgh and the Ninewells / Newcastle pilot study of ex-vivo lung perfusion

Within Fife we are currently actively engaging with schools to educate children regarding organ donation, allowing them and hopefully their families to make their decisions based on unbiased and accurate information.

We are at the early stages of developing a tissue donation service and are looking to drive forward with eye donation. Also we are currently in the process of training permanent members of staff in eye retrieval which will remove staffing constraints to eye donation.

We are introducing protocols regarding organ donation from the emergency department to ensure that no-one is denied the opportunity to donate.

Our intensive care staff (the ICU is the location where the vast majority of potential organ donors are managed) are highly motivated and firmly believe in the benefits of organ donation, both to the families of those who have donated and to those who subsequently receive an organ donation. This has driven an ethos of trying to maximise appropriate and ethical organ donation in Fife.

3 *Do you have any other views on what the petition seeks?*

Organ donation is a very emotive subject and it is important not to jeopardise the positive public opinion that has developed regarding donation. We do not want any negative publicity to be generated which may impact on the program and one of the fears is that moving to an opt-out system may generate this. Please remember we are dealing with families often facing their worst nightmare and any approach that could be deemed to be even slightly heavy handed, will not only cause unnecessary distress, but also generate negative publicity for the organ donation programme. We should not underestimate the fact that, at present, donating your organs is an altruistic gift towards others. You are helping others to live through your generous gift, a move to opting out will reduce this element of "gifting" in the public's and donor's eyes and may in the long term prove harmful.

I trust this response provides you with the information you need.

Yours sincerely

DR BRIAN MONTGOMERY
Medical Director NHS Fife