

POLICY DOCUMENT

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION POLICY

Background

The Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) is the peak representative body for medical students in Australia.

Organ transplantation is a life-saving treatment of last resort for individuals with organ failure, and can provide dramatic increases in quality of life to recipients.

Apart from extending life and improving quality of life for recipients, organ transplantation also presents a significant economic benefit. The ongoing cost of care for patients awaiting organ transplant can be very high, with the annual cost of dialysis treatment for a patient with end-stage kidney disease being \$84,000. This is contrasted with the cost of a kidney transplant surgery costing \$75,000 (\$65,000 from a deceased donor) with an ongoing cost of \$11,000 annually.[1] In cases where the patient survives for more than a year there is almost immediate economic benefit. Furthermore a reduction in morbidity resulting from a transplant can produce other economic benefits, including the ability of the patient to return to the workforce.

The number of Australians aged sixteen and above who had indicated their intent to donate organs and tissues was over four million as at the 31st of March, 2012.[2] However, even if an individual registers for organ donation, donation will not occur without consent from the donor's family. Only 57% of Australians are aware of the wishes of their loved ones [3], and this may be a contributing factor to Australia's low rate of familial consent, where less than 60% of families allow donations to proceed.[3]

Australia uses an opt-in organ and tissue donation system. Many countries that use opt-in and opt-out systems have a higher donation rate than Australia. Globally there have been varied results for rates of organ donation in countries that have changed from 'opt-in' to 'opt-out' models. Other factors are important to increase donation rates, including public awareness and strong leadership by a central organisation that sets standards, allocates organs, and supports local retrieval arrangements.[4] Australia's awareness of the organ and tissue donation system needs to be increased.[2,3]

The DonateLife Network (donatelife.gov.au) is a nationally coordinated approach and system for organ and tissue donation across Australia. It runs public campaigns and events through initiatives such as an annual DonateLife week; which the AMA supports.[5] The Australian Government has published a National Reform Agenda for organ and tissue donation, which supports enhancing medical education on the issue of organ and tissue donation.[6]

The "Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR) is a list of people who may be willing to donate bone marrow or blood stem cells to give a transplant patient a second chance at life." [7] There are significant online resources which explain the process of joining the registry, which is simply signing a form when donating blood.[7]

Position statement

AMSA believes that:

1. Organ, tissue and bone marrow donation is an important and cost-effective medical treatment, that is critical for improving patient health;
2. There is potential for Australia's rate of organ donation to increase;

3. There should be user friendly, easily accessible information available to all Australians on organ, tissue and bone marrow and there should be easily accessible and advertised options to sign up to the opt-in system; and
4. Australians, and particularly medical students, can make a difference in this health issue, through discussions with their family and participating in campaigns such as DonateLife.

Policy

AMSA calls upon:

1. Australian governments to support:
 - 1.1 A nationally co-ordinated public awareness campaign that:
 - 1.1.1 increases awareness of the benefits of organ donation, for individuals and the community;
 - 1.1.2 promotes a simplified, easily accessible way for individuals to register their wishes, and notifies family and/or loved ones of these wishes;
 - 1.1.3 allows electronic registration with subsequent mail sent to the registered person and their family and loved ones.
 - 1.2 Continued efforts to promote organ donation, such as DonateLife, which encourage:
 - 1.2.1 people to consider their willingness to register for organ, tissue and bone marrow donation;
 - 1.2.2 increased family awareness of relatives' intentions regarding organ and tissue donation; and
 - 1.2.3 increased public awareness and understanding of the organ and tissue donation process.
2. Medical students to consider:
 - 2.1 their willingness to register for organ, tissue and bone marrow donation; and
 - 2.2 promoting organ, tissue and bone marrow donation.
3. Medical Student Societies to consider addressing this issue, for example, collaborating with organ donation advocacy groups, such as DonateLife, or suggesting that blood donors also sign up to be an organ donor and register for the ABMDR during the AMSA Vampire Cup.

References

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- [3] DonateLife. 2012, *Facts and Statistics*, Canberra ACT. available from: <http://www.donatelife.gov.au/discover/facts-a-statistics> accessed 07/2012)
- [4] NSW Government, Department of Health. 2011, *Increasing Organ Donation in NSW*, Sydney NSW. (available from: http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2011/pdf/increasing_organ_donation.pdf accessed 07/2012)
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- [7] Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry. 2008, *Joining the bone marrow registry* (brochure). (available from: http://www.abmdr.org.au/pdf/dynamic_pages/3/82514915_donorbroschure_08.pdf accessed 07/2012)