

SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP FORUM

CHRIS RUDGE AND ORGAN DONATION (JANUARY 2010)

FAQs

(It may be helpful to read these FAQs and answers in conjunction with the Organ Donation FAQ page of the NHS Blood and Transplant website at:

http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk/ukt/how_to_become_a_donor/questions/questions.jsp)

Why is Organ Donation important?

There is a shortage of donor organs for transplantation in this country. There are around 10,000 people waiting for a donor organ in the UK and 1,000 people a year die before receiving a suitable organ.

What is being done about the shortage of donor organs?

The Organ Donation Taskforce's 2008 report and recommendations were accepted by all four UK Health Ministers. If all the recommendations were implemented then an increase of 50% in transplants would be achievable by 2013.

The Prime Minister subsequently said that an increase of 'more than 50%' was to be our target, along with a substantial increase in the numbers signing the Organ Donor Register (ODR). Currently there are 16.8m people signed on the Register (up by 6.5% since the start of our programme) and we need to increase this to 25m by 2013.

What is Chris Rudge's role?

Chris Rudge is the National Clinical Director for Transplantation. He chairs the programme delivery board set up in June 2008 to steer the changes identified by the Taskforce. The board includes the key organisations responsible for implementation including NHS Blood & Transplant, the Royal College of Anaesthetists, the Intensive Care Society, the British Transplant Society and representatives from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

What are the key messages on organ donation for the NHS?

The Taskforce recommendations are focused on better donor identification and referral, better donor coordination, strengthened retrieval arrangements and on the need to invest in the infrastructure of organ donation. The message we need to convey is that donation should be usual rather than unusual: and educating both clinicians and the public about how they can become organ donors and give the gift of life is a vital part of that message.

Why is this relevant for the Social Partnership Forum?

The Department has not so far engaged the Forum organisations formally as potential stakeholders in the organ donation programme work (although the unions have been active with NHS Blood & Transplant on blood donation). However the principles which underpin organ donation chime with the traditional ethos of trades unionism, and there are several of our programme objectives on which we would hope to work with the health unions and with employers.

What scope is there for Forum members' engagement?

The key message we want to convey is that donation should be seen as a usual rather than an exceptional event. This message needs to be brought home to both clinicians and the public, so they always bear in mind the importance of organ donation and its potential for offering the gift of life to someone on the waiting list.

Making donation normal also means making sure that hospital staff always consider the potential for transplantation when someone dies within the hospital.

Many of these hospital staff will be members of unions and associations represented at the Forum. We see an opportunity for working with health unions and their members to help bring about a more general acceptance that organ donation is usual rather than unusual; and would value a brief discussion at the Forum meeting about ways in which this could be tackled. Chris Rudge will introduce the topic.

How can we raise awareness of the Organ Donor Register?

We need to use every avenue we can to increase the numbers on the NHS Organ Donor Register and to encourage people to have conversations with their relatives about their wishes. We need in particular to raise awareness and registration rates among people from ethnic minority communities: they are disproportionately represented on transplant waiting lists and under-represented amongst donors. Trades unions have shown themselves willing and effective promoters of the gift relationship where blood donation is concerned, and we feel that they may be equally helpful partners in helping raise the awareness of their members about organ donation.

NHS Blood & Transplant have made preliminary approaches on donor registration to the TUC, who have pointed to the Forum as an excellent way in to further work with individual unions. NHS Blood & Transplant run the ODR and would welcome the opportunity of campaigning with individual trades unions and with employers.