NHS Employers is working with NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) to raise awareness among the NHS workforce about the importance of organ donation. We aim to gain the support of senior managers to endorse organ donation as a normal activity for their trusts and to make the process of signing up to the register as easy as possible for NHS staff. We hope that, by giving NHS organisations the facts about organ donation, staff can use this information to make an informed decision about whether to sign up to the NHS Organ Donation Register.

The need for organs is constant. Currently in the UK, more than 10,000 people need an organ transplant. Every year, 1,000 people – three a day – will die before an organ becomes available. In 2009/10, thousands of lives were saved or transformed when 3,709 organ transplants were carried out. A further 3,099 people had their sight restored thanks to cornea transplants.

**Key facts**

- One person can save or improve the lives of up to nine people through organ donation after they die.
- More than 17.4 million people have joined the NHS Organ Donor Register.
- 90 per cent of people in the UK say they support organ donation. To date only 27 per cent have joined the NHS Organ Donor Register.

**About organ transplants**

Transplants involve the donation of organs from one person to another, and enable about 3,000 people to take on a new lease of life in the UK every year.

Kidney transplants are the most commonly performed. Transplants of the heart, liver and lungs are also regularly carried out. As medicine advances, other vital organs (including the pancreas and small bowel) are also being used in transplants. Tissue such as eyes, heart valves, skin and bone can also be donated.

There is a serious shortage of donors, which means that people sometimes wait for years and some die before a suitable organ becomes available.

**Who needs an organ transplant?**

Organ transplants are often the last hope when someone is suffering from organ failure.
Organ failure can happen because of illness or injury. Kidney failure, heart disease, lung disease and cirrhosis of the liver are all conditions that might be effectively treated by a transplant. For problems with the heart, the lungs and other highly sensitive organs, a transplant is typically the last resort.

Kidneys and livers may be transplanted from a living donor. For these procedures, a patient will generally find a willing donor in a friend or family member. If the donor is a match, they can proceed directly to the surgery stage.

NHS Organ Donor Register

The NHS Organ Donor Register is a national, confidential list of people who are willing to become donors after their death. It can be quickly accessed to see whether an individual has registered a willingness to be an organ donor. It can literally be a life-saver.

It takes five minutes to join the register - visit [www.organdonation.nhs.uk](http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk) to do so. Putting your name on the NHS Organ Donor Register makes everyone aware of your wishes and makes it easier for them to agree to your donation.

When you register it is important that you tell those closest to you about your decision. Even if your name is on the register, the person closest to you in life will be asked to confirm that you had not changed your mind. Putting your name on the register demonstrates your consent to the use of your organs for transplantation.

Facing up to the death of a loved one is hard. Having to make a decision about organ donation when unsure what that person would have wanted can cause extra pain.

About NHS Blood and Transplant

NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) is a special health authority in England and Wales, with responsibilities across the United Kingdom in relation to blood and organ donation and transplantation.

Its remit is to save and improve lives through the provision of a safe and reliable supply of blood components, diagnostic services, tissues, solid organs and plasma proteins to the NHS. Among NHSBT’s responsibilities are:

- encouraging people to donate organs, blood and tissues
- optimising the safety and supply of blood, organs and tissues
- helping to raise the quality, effectiveness and clinical outcomes of blood and transplant services
- providing expert advice to other NHS organisations, the Department of Health, ministers and devolved administrations
- providing appropriate advice and support to health services in other countries
- commissioning and conducting research and development
- actively engaging in implementing relevant EU statutory frameworks and guidance
- being involved in broader international developments.

NHSBT campaigns to:

- raise awareness about the success of transplantation and the urgent need for more organ donors
- make it easier for people to find out more and join the NHS Organ Donor Register
- encourage people to talk about their wishes with their family and friends.

For more information, please call 0300 123 2323 or visit [www.organdonation.nhs.uk](http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk)
Common donation myths

There are many misconceptions that prevent people from signing up to the register. Here are some of the most popular:

**I carry a donor card, so I must be on the register.**
Even if you carry an organ donor card, it doesn’t necessarily mean that you are on the NHS Organ Donor Register. You would need to contact NHSBT to check, or register again online, to be sure that your wishes are recorded.

**I have an existing medical condition, they won’t want my organs.**
Having a medical condition does not necessarily prevent a person from becoming an organ or tissue donor. The decision about whether some or all organs (or tissue) are suitable for transplant is made by a healthcare professional, taking into account your medical history. There are only two conditions where donation is ruled out completely: if a person has been diagnosed with HIV or if they have, or are suspected of having, Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease (CJD).

**I’m too old to be an organ donor.**
Age isn’t a barrier to becoming an organ or tissue donor. People in their 70s and 80s have become donors and saved many lives.

**My religion prevents me from being an organ donor.**
None of the major religions in the UK object to organ and tissue donation and transplantation. Any doubts should be discussed with a spiritual or religious adviser.

**Doctors will not pursue all efforts to save me if they know I’m a donor.**
Doctors have a duty of care to save life first. If, despite their efforts, the patient dies, organ and tissue donation can then be considered and a completely different team of donation and transplant specialists would be called in.

Religious perspectives

All the major religions of the UK support the principles of organ donation and transplantation and accept that organ donation is an individual choice. However, within each religion, there are different viewpoints. NHSBT has worked closely with religious leaders of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism to research and produce a series of leaflets explaining organ donation and religious viewpoints and principles. Please visit www.organdonation.nhs.uk for more information.

Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups

South Asian and black communities living in the UK are three to four times more likely to need an organ transplant than the rest of the population. This is because people from these communities are more likely to develop diabetes or high blood pressure, both of which are major causes of kidney failure.

Donation rates are relatively low among South Asian and black communities, reducing the chance of a successful match being found. It is essential to increase the number of willing donors from these communities.

Communicating the message to NHS staff

There are many ways to communicate the need for more donors to both existing and new staff. NHSBT can provide promotional materials, time...
and support to help get people talking about donation, email campaigns@nhsbr.nhs.uk for more details.

Some ideas to raise awareness with existing staff include:

- adding a link to the NHS Organ Donation Register web pages on your website or intranet page
- publishing case studies and news articles on organ donation on your intranet, newsletter and other internal communication channels
- displaying posters and have registration leaflets readily available for staff
- inviting one of NHSBT’s specialist nurses or clinical leads to give a talk
- attaching campaign materials and registration leaflets to staff payslips.

Some ideas to raise awareness with new staff include:

- considering a slot on organ donation at staff induction days
- including information in your staff welcome pack
- adding a tick box for signing up to the organ donor register on one of the forms that new starters have to complete.

NHS West Midlands Workforce Education Organs for Transplants Project

NHS West Midlands is the lead strategic health authority (SHA) for organ donation. The SHA has modelled an approach to increasing organ donation among NHS staff that can be replicated across the UK. The focus of the project was:

- to facilitate decision-making around organ donation
- to support NHS staff to make an informed choice regarding their views on organ donation, feeling confident and comfortable in discussing

Case study: being a kidney recipient, Colin Smith’s story

I had been on dialysis for a year, due to renal failure. The treatment did not bother me, you get used to it, after all it is keeping you alive. The doctors did not know how long my kidney would keep working, but that I would definitely need a transplant in the future.

I carried a pager with me 24 hours a day. It never left my side, apart from in the shower, while I was waiting for the call.

On the 29 May 1996, three days after my birthday, the phone started to ring. It was the transplant coordinator from the Freemans Hospital in Newcastle, saying there was a possible kidney for me and that an ambulance would pick me up shortly.

That night consisted of many blood tests, along with some x-rays and a full medical, and at 1pm I was told that the transplant was to go ahead at 2pm. Six to eight weeks later I was back to work.

That was 13 years ago. I now live a normal life, apart from all the drugs to stop me from rejecting the kidney. I feel the transplant not only changed my life, but my whole family’s lives too.

I lost some very good friends while they were waiting for the call that never came. I was one of the lucky ones. I had carried a donor card from the age of 18 and 18 years later I needed the help of someone else. I don’t know who my kidney came from but I sent a letter to the donor family via the transplant coordinator to say thank you for the greatest gift of all, the gift of life.
the issue with patients, members of the public and colleagues.

The project involved raising awareness of the NHS Organ Donor Register among NHS staff in West Midlands. To do this, five NHS trusts were recruited as pilot sites:

- West Midlands Strategic Health Authority
- Sandwell Mental Health Foundation Trust
- Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust
- Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trusts
- University Hospitals of North Staffordshire.

Activities undertaken by the pilot sites included:

- writing of articles on organ donation that were featured on the trust websites
- running events to raise awareness
- including information on organ donation with every job advert on NHS Jobs
- an interview on the BBC’s regional news broadcast ‘Midlands Today’
- the establishment of organ donation action groups
- creation of pages on staff intranet sites
- information in pay slips
- displaying posters in staff areas
- compilation of a ‘How to’ guide
- production of case studies.

The project has been expanded to include 14 pilot sites, representing a third of West Midlands trusts. More information is available from [http://www.westmidlands.nhs.uk/MultiProfessionalWorkforce/OrgansforTransplant.aspx](http://www.westmidlands.nhs.uk/MultiProfessionalWorkforce/OrgansforTransplant.aspx)

“NHS Employers and NHS Blood and Transplant have my strong support in this work. I hope the promotion of organ donation will increasingly be seen as a normal part of trusts’ activities and I hope too that even more staff will consider joining the Organ Donor Register.”


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Case study: being a donor

George Higginson saved five lives when he was just ten years old.

Jonathan and Sarah Higginson’s son, George, died, aged ten, after he was knocked off his bike in August 2009. George saved five lives following his death, thanks to the six organs his family donated. Only weeks before his accident, he had been watching a television programme with his mum about a girl who needed a transplant and he asked her about it. According to Sarah, George couldn’t understand why anyone wouldn’t donate their organs and said that he definitely wanted to. Mrs Higginson, a nurse within the NHS, said: “Despite our own pain at losing George, it was not a difficult decision for us to let them use his organs. If he knew he had saved five people’s lives that would have been the ultimate achievement for him. George wanted to change things for the better and his attitude was ‘if you think you can, you can.’ He will certainly have changed the lives of those five people and we are very proud of him.”

Since his death, Jonathan and Sarah have worked hard to raise awareness of organ donation. They have met with Geraldine Smith (their local MP) and are continuing to use George’s inspirational attitude to campaign for more people to decide whether or not to sign up to the NHS Organ Donor Register.
NHS Employers represents trusts in England on workforce issues and helps employers to ensure the NHS is a place where people want to work. The NHS workforce is at the heart of quality patient care and we believe that employers must drive the workforce agenda. We work with employers to reflect their views and act on their behalf in four priority areas:

- pay and negotiations
- recruitment and planning the workforce
- healthy and productive workplaces
- employment policy and practice.

NHS Employers is part of the NHS Confederation.

Contact us

For more information on how to become involved in our work,
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