



Foreword

The last decade has seen a huge increase in the number of deceased donors and lifesaving or life transforming transplants. Until February 2020, we were confident that we would once again see a UK record number of organ donors and transplants. Then the global COVID-19 pandemic hit in March and the impact was felt across the whole of the NHS and in every aspect of UK society.

In March 2020 we witnessed a sharp reduction in activity with a decline in deceased donors as well as the number of transplants. This was due to concerns for patient safety and the fact NHS resources were required to deal with the COVID-19 crisis.

Through dedication, effort and with the support of the wider NHS, we were able to keep aspects of organ donation and transplantation available for highly urgent patients even during the peak of the surge of COVID-19. Yet there was still a fall in the overall number of deceased organ donors - 1,580 compared to 1,600 last year. Subsequently, the number of patients who received a deceased organ donor transplant fell from 3,952 to 3,760.

Unfortunately COVID-19 also had a big impact on living donation kidney transplant numbers just as it did in most other countries. Living donor transplants fell by 4% to 1,001.

We fully realise that this has been a very worrying time for patients who are awaiting a transplant and for the families of those patients. We would like to take this opportunity to reassure them that the recovery of donation and transplantation is well underway and the majority of transplant units have reopened, with all heart, lungs and liver transplant units functioning at the time of writing.

Despite these challenges, it is testament to the strong foundations laid in the UK that we have seen incredible family support for organ donation. Even during the worst days of the pandemic there were 91 deceased organ donors (March 2020) from UK intensive care units. Impressively the overall consent/authorisation rate for organ donation has continued to rise over the last year to 68%. During the pandemic crisis this consent rate was even higher at 74.5% (March 2020).

Looking forward we are committed to do all that we can to increase the number of organ donors and transplants even as we continue to fight COVID-19. We hope that, with England's move to an opt out system as a result of Max and Keira's law, we will continue to see improved public support for organ donation as Wales has seen since the legislative change in December 2015. Scotland is intending to commence its own deemed authorisation legislation in the Spring of 2021.

With the new law in effect in England since 20 May 2020, it is important that people know that they still have a choice whether or not to donate. Families will still be consulted, and people's faith culture and beliefs will continue to be respected. We are grateful to all those in the faith and belief community across the UK who advised us during the preparation for the legislative change.

As the current pandemic situation improves, we believe that the new law and growing public support will lead to even more lives saved.

Anthony Clarkson
Director - Organ and Tissue
Donation and Transplantation

Prof John Forsythe
Medical Director - Organ and
Tissue Donation and
Transplantation

Dr Dale Gardiner
National Clinical Lead For Organ
Donation

