



# Foreword

The last 12 months have been the most challenging in our history due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The whole NHS was put under intense pressure and the effects were also seen in Organ Donation and Transplantation. In April 2020, during the peak of the first wave of the pandemic, we saw a sharp reduction in the number of deceased donors and transplants – the lowest number ever recorded on a monthly basis with just 100 transplants taking place.

However, with a great team effort across clinical teams, deceased organ donation and transplant activity continued for the most urgent patients during the first wave of Covid-19 and returned to pre-Covid levels quite rapidly. Indeed, July and August were record summer months.

Despite further waves of the pandemic, numbers of transplants never fell so dramatically again and we were able to conclude the year with 75% of proceeding deceased donor activity (1,180) and 78% of deceased donor transplants (2,947) compared to the previous year. These numbers compared favourably to many of our international peers.

Even during the pandemic's worst weeks, we saw incredible family support for organ donation with record numbers of families agreeing to donation, providing those patients on the waiting list with life-saving organ transplants. This is testament to the strong foundation of altruism and support for donation, across the UK. The consent/authorisation rate for organ donation was at its highest ever last year, reaching 69% - a 1% rise on the previous year's figure and representing the sixth consecutive year of continuous improvement.

There was also a significant change to the organ donation and transplantation system in 2020/21, with England switching to an opt-out legislation in May 2020 and Scotland in March 2021. This change has seen an increase in the number of opt-in registrations on the NHS Organ Donor Register from 26.0 to 26.7 million at the end of March 2021. There were also 2 million people who chose to opt-out of donating their organs after death. However, this is much lower than the initial estimates for opt out registrations when the law changed – the forecast was 8% of people opting out, when in fact it's just over 3%.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 also had an impact on living donation just as it did in most other countries. Living donor transplants fell by 58% to 444, this was due to the fact that we had to pause the UK Living Kidney Sharing Scheme for the safety of both the patient and the donor during the peak of the pandemic. This has now resumed, and every effort is being made to ensure that it continues to run smoothly.

We realise this has been a very worrying time for those patients who are waiting for a transplant and the families supporting those patients. We would like to reassure them that the recovery of organ donation and transplantation, both living and deceased, is well underway and deceased donation rates are back to pre-COVID levels thanks to the huge support of all those families who agree to donation and the clinical teams who work tirelessly to get the best outcome for patients.



There is a long way to go before the NHS fully recovers from the effects of COVID-19. The number of patients registered on the active waiting list for a transplant in the UK fell to 4,256 at the end of March 2021, however this does not fully reflect the need for an organ transplant. Many transplant centres are still getting through the backlog of patient referrals and re-activations on to the transplant waiting list and it is currently forecast that the number of those likely waiting for a transplant is around 7000.

Although this report is focused around figures, each one represents a real person. Those who made the decision to save someone's life through organ donation, someone waiting eagerly for that call for a lifesaving transplant, those who receive the gift of life and those who sadly died waiting. We thank everyone who has played a part in keeping organ donation and transplantation going throughout the global pandemic and our promise is to work towards closing the gap between those waiting and those who receive a lifesaving transplant.



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