

An Exploration of the Reasons for Decline in Neurological Death Testing in Northern Ireland

(April 2021 – March 2022)



Blood and Transplant

Northern Ireland Organ Donation Services Team

Introduction

During the year 21/22 the neurological death testing rate in NI dropped to 73%.

- Of 75 patients meeting criteria for testing, 20 patients were not tested.
- This project aimed to explore the reasons for lack of testing in these 20 cases.
- Our secondary aim was to assess how many of the patients not tested progressed to DCD donation.

Methods

- The case numbers for each of the 20 cases were identified using the potential donor audit.
- A retrospective trawl of the relevant patient notes and observations was then undertaken.

Results

The most common reasons for lack of testing were as follows:

- Haemodynamic instability (N = 5)
- Actively dying (N = 4)
- High FiO₂ requirement (N = 4)
- Clinician concern (N = 3)

Of the 20 patients who were not tested by neurological criteria, there were 8 eligible donors.

- All 8 families were approached in a collaborative fashion by our team.
- 5 out of 8 patients proceeded to DCD donation.

Conclusion

- Northern Ireland has seen a drop in the neurological death testing rate.
- This pattern has been seen across the UK in the last couple of years.
- At a NI regional collaborative meeting in June 2022 we agreed to look at the reasons behind this decrease in testing rate.
- We found that clinical factors such as haemodynamic instability and high FiO₂ requirements together with clinician concern accounted for the majority of cases not tested.
- It is encouraging that all 8 families of potential donors in the group were approached in a collaborative fashion by our teams.
- 5 of these patients progressed to DCD donation.

