

Tissue Donation

as part of End of Life Care Guidance

It is important that people are given the opportunity to express their wishes about their end of life care so that these can be discussed with their family and care provider. Discussing preferences such as preferred place of death, wishes regarding resuscitation or Organ and Tissue Donation overcomes misunderstandings and facilitates the fulfilling of people's wishes when they are dying, and what happens after their death.

It is important therefore to support your patients/residents/family members by offering them the opportunity to Advance Care Plan as early as is appropriate for them (see **Advance Care Plan Toolkit** at: <http://www.southcentral.nhs.uk/end-of-life-care>).

Why consider Tissue Donation?

One tissue donor can enhance the lives of 50 people through the transplantation of tissues such as:

- Eye tissue, specifically sclera and corneas, to repair injuries to the eye and restore vision.
- Heart valves and other tissue for replacement and repair operations.
- Skin, for use in the treatment of burns.
- Bone, for use in orthopaedic operations.
- Tendons and ligaments, for replacement operations.

You may have concerns about asking but remember

- The majority of people are in favour of donation regardless of ethnicity or religious preference [YouGov, 2007].
- Family members are not distressed by being asked about donation, they value the opportunity to consider this option [Sque et al, 2003].

Can older people be donors?

Yes, in the case of eye tissue, skin and bone, age does not matter. There is an upper age limit for tendons and ligaments of 60 years and lower limit of 17 years. The upper age limit for heart valves is 65 years.

When is Tissue Donation not possible?

If the patient had any of the following at the time of death:

- Systemic infection
- HIV, Hepatitis B or C
- Dementia and other neuro-degenerative diseases
- Diseases of unknown aetiology
- Leukaemia and Lymphoma
- Patients diagnosed with Cancer who do not have ocular involvement are able to donate eyes.
- Active Tuberculosis

Any questions regarding potential donors, and their underlying diagnosis, should be discussed with the National Referral Centre on **0800 432 0559**.

What happens if a patient/resident/family member wishes to donate tissues?

If a wish to donate tissues is expressed, then the following needs to occur:

Contact The National Referral Centre (NRC) promptly on **0800 432 0559**, they will guide you on the actions you need to take as:

- Eye donation must take place within 24 hours.
- The potential eye only donor does not need to be in a mortuary for donation to take place, but arranging eye donation outside of hospital settings is difficult.
- Other tissue can be donated up to 48 hours after death.
- If multi tissue donation is to take place the donor must be in the mortuary within 6 hours of their heart ceasing to beat.
- In all cases a blood sample from the potential donor is needed by the retrieval team within 24 hours of death.
- If death occurs at home, tissue donation is more difficult to organise, it is important to contact the NRC and discuss this possibility.

What information does the NRC need?

The NRC Nurse Practitioners will ask the referring person for details of the potential donor such as date of birth, time of death, some medical information, and if there will be any involvement by the Coroner. The NRC practitioner will request contact details for the registered next of kin, who they will then contact to discuss the option of Tissue Donation. It is helpful if the person who makes the referral informs the family member that they will be contacted by a Nurse Practitioner from Tissue Services.

Tissue services make all the arrangements for the donation of the tissue after discussion with the family. Tissue donation is carried out by specialist healthcare professionals, working in accordance with the Human Tissue Act (2004).

Will donation interfere with funeral arrangements?

No. Funeral arrangements, the work of the Pathologist and HM Coroners are not Interrupted or compromised by the donation process. NHSBT currently works in partnership with HM Coroners and Pathologists on a national basis.

Will relatives be able to see their loved one after the tissues have been retrieved?

Yes. The Nurse Practitioner in NRC will discuss this option with the family member during the consent process. The Nurse will explain the reconstruction process for each tissue that is donated. Family members will have as much information as they need to make decisions regarding viewing their relative after tissue donation has taken place.

What happens after tissue has been donated?

Family members will receive a letter from the NRC within two weeks of donation. This letter will express thanks to the family member for facilitating tissue donation and provide details of:

- Whether donation took place.
- The reasons for donation not going ahead.
- The tissues that were donated, and if details are available, the age and gender of the recipient [if this information is not available at the time of writing then it can be provided at a later date].

Family members and staff are encouraged to contact the **National Referral Centre** on **0800 432 0559** if they have any questions or concerns and if they wish to receive further information.

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