

Knowledge of neonatal organ donation among middle grade (registrar) doctors in tertiary neonatal units

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Unlike adult practice, organ donation happens infrequently on neonatal units.¹ With the release of guidelines on diagnosing brainstem death in neonates between 37 weeks' gestation to two months of age,² there is potential to expand the donor pool with neonatal organs.

An opportunity to donate neonatal organs arose in our tertiary neonatal unit; however, due to practical difficulties with the case we achieved only tissue donation (heart valves) and not organ donation. The process of neonatal organ donation requires careful and co-ordinated planning with the organ donation team. Lack of experience and knowledge among medical staff only compounds this problem. Recognising that staff education might be a problem, we decided to conduct a survey via a short telephone interview to determine the knowledge of neonatal organ donation among junior doctors.

Method and results

A telephone survey was carried out; we contacted a neonatal registrar working in the tertiary neonatal unit of 40 hospitals in England and Wales via the switchboard of the main hospital. The survey comprised five questions and participants were given the option of making a comment at the end.

Out of the 40 tertiary units contacted, we obtained answers from neonatal registrars at 27 units (**TABLE 1**) and we received some comments:

"Neonatal organ donation is a rare event so we have not had much experience."

"We have had recent discussion at the network meeting."

"It is unusual for neonates to donate organs."

"There was a recent teaching regarding neonatal organ donation."

"I will have to consult the internet for more details."

"Information regarding contact details would be more useful than a guideline."

"My consultant might know more about this."

Discussion

Our mini-survey confirms our suspicions of a potential deficiency in the knowledge of neonatal organ donation among trainee doctors and emphasises the need for providing further education. More than two-thirds of the participants were not aware of the process of organising organ donation or the details of who to contact. This was a small study and consequently there are limitations to the interpretations. Thirteen out of 40 units did not respond, which might indicate that it is not ideal to contact the on-call registrar by phone when they are covering a busy tertiary unit. Perhaps an email survey may have been more appropriate. It should be pointed out that the relevant person on the unit for organising organ donation is usually the consultant and/or senior nurse rather than the registrar; perhaps, therefore, these results are not unexpected. Nevertheless, it is essential that trainees are kept up-to-date with their knowledge. Teaching sessions, especially with the organ donation team, may help trainees to better

Question	Yes	No	Other
1. Are you aware of neonatal organ donation taking place in your unit in the last six months?	4	21	Not sure = 1 Would not reveal as considered confidential = 1
2. Do you know the process of organising donation?	10	16	'Roughly' = 1
3. Do you know who to contact to arrange donation?	12	10	'Roughly' / Would look up = 5
4. Is there a guideline on neonatal organ donation on your unit?	3	18	In development = 4 Unsure = 2
5. If there is currently no guideline, would having one be helpful?	21	1	

TABLE 1 The questions put to the neonatal registrars.

understand the process and assist the team to initiate the process of organ donation.

Following our unsuccessful experience of neonatal organ donation, we now include information and contact details of the regional organ donation team in our bereavement pack as well as leaflets for parents. This initiative was led by Kirsty Platt, one of the bereavement nurses on the unit. Once a potential candidate is identified, the bereavement team of the hospital is contacted and together we liaise with the organ donation team while supporting the parents during this distressing time. We have not yet had a further opportunity of neonatal organ donation but we are now prepared should the situation present itself.

References

1. **Scales A.** Neonatal and infant organ donation: a challenging concept? *Infant* 2018;14:14-17.
2. **RCPCH.** *The Diagnosis of Death by Neurological Criteria in Infants Less Than Two Months Old*. 2015. Online at: www.rcpch.ac.uk/system/files/protected/page/dnc%20guide%20final.pdf

Neonatal Organ Donation Referral Process

It is best to speak to the organ/tissue donation team prior to discussing donation as not all babies are suitable donors

Contact the Hospital Team on bleep 5708 Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm for advice and information

At weekends and nights, contact NHSBT on 07659 180773

NHSBT run a 24-hour on-call service and are happy to advise at any time

If deemed appropriate NHSBT will come and discuss options with families, take consent and arrange organ retrieval

It is best to speak to the North West Organ Donation Services Team prior to offering organ donation options to the parents (unless they themselves raised the possibility).

If organ donation is still a possibility after discussion with the SN-OD, contact theatre staff to inform them of an estimated time of delivery so that they can make preparations.

Contact: North West Organ Donation Services Team Tel: 0151 268 7210

The organ donation referral process from the bereavement pack.