

120 West Australians wait for organ donation

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AT least four people will die this year waiting for a liver transplant and more than 120 others are on waiting lists for heart, lung, liver and kidney transplants in WA.

Only eight people have donated organs so far this year in WA and another eight families have said no to organ donation because they did not know their loved one's wishes.

Australia has one of the lowest donor rates in the western world with only 10 per million giving the gift of life compared with 20 per million in Europe and 35 per million in Spain.

Patients on the waiting list and the life-saving transplant teams at Sir Charles Gairdner and Royal Perth Hospitals are pinning their hopes on a summit into organ donation to be held later in the year to find ways of boosting the number of donors.

Most crucial is the need for livers and on average three to four people per year in WA will die because a liver did not become available in time.

In the short term, Associate professor Luc Delriviere, who is head of the liver and kidney transplant service at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, has called for all West Australians to tell their families their views on organ donation.

"What people don't realise is that if they say no, there is not another 200 families who are going to say yes. They don't understand how crucial every single yes or no is," he said.

Only 19 organ donors were recorded in WA last year and Assoc Prof Delriviere said the waiting list for a liver transplant is six to nine months and for a kidney transplant is 3 years.

"With only 19 people last year, that is only once or twice a month and so for each family that says no it is a huge problem and what is so frustrating for us is to see a family that is pro organ donation and they say "yes, yes we are pro organ donation, but we don't know what he wanted and who are we to make that decision" and they say no.

"It comes back to that awareness and also that cultural shift where it becomes part of what is right or what is the Australian way.

He believes the question of organ donation should be raised by Medicare so that all Australian's are approached and their wishes recorded on a national database.

Under the current Australian Organ Donor Registrar, people are required to make contact themselves. About 650,000 West Australians have record their wishes, but Assoc Prof Delriviere said knowing only 41 per cent of adult WA's wishes was not enough.

"One of the systems we had proposed is universal registration where everyone has to say something. It is not about opting in or opting out. Through Medicare, you get approached about whether they have made a decision about organ donation.

"The big question about that system is it would require very good information to be provided. It would need a lot of education for the staff.

"NZ had it and it didn't work very well because the people didn't give the right information and a lot of people said no for the wrong reasons."

When someone dies, the family are given a few hours to make a decision about organ donation, but Dr Delriviere said it is a hard choice to make at such a traumatic time.

"That's an enormous decision to make for the family and if they have any hint or any information on paper they will say yes, but if they don't, even if they are pro organ donation they will say no by default.

"If you have not had that conversation and then you have to decide for them you might not know whether they wanted to or not and that can be an enormous decision for the family to make."

Facts & Statistics:

120 people are waiting for an organ transplant in WA.

4 need a heart, 6 need lungs, 10 need a liver and 100 need kidneys

Liver and Kidney transplants are performed at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital.

Heart, lung and kidney transplants are performed at Royal Perth Hospital.

Organs from donors in other states are transplanted into WA patients.

Organs from WA donors are used in WA and other states.

2008

Total donors: 8

Number of recipients, who were not necessarily from WA: kidney 14, liver 7, heart 6, heart/lung 0, lung 5, pancreas 0

2007

Total donors: 19 in WA, (Total: 198 in Australia.)

Number of recipients, who were not necessarily from WA: 33 kidneys, 15 livers, 6 hearts, 1 heart/lung, 7 lungs & 3 pancreas,

2006

Total donors: 21 in WA (Australia: 202)

Number of recipients, who were not necessarily from WA: Kidney 38, liver 17, heart 9, heart/lung 0, lung 9, pancreas 2

2005

Total donors: 30 in WA (Australia: 204)

Number of recipients, who were not necessarily from WA: Kidney 56, liver 25, heart 11, heart/lung 2, lung 9, pancreas 2,

2004

Total donors: 23 in WA (Australia: 218)

Number of recipients, who were not necessarily from WA: kidney: 39, liver 17, heart 8, heart/lung 0, lung 9, pancreas 0.

2003

Total donors: 18 in WA (Australia: 179)

Number of recipients, who were not necessarily from WA: kidney 33, liver 15, heart 11, heart/lung 0, lung 8, pancreas 0.

Donor Register

The Australian Organ Donor Register was set up in January 2005 so Australian's could record their consent (or objection) to becoming an organ donor after death.

About 650,000 West Australians have registered with only 1600 objecting to the organs being donated.

The register can be accessed by medical professionals Australia-wide so that your decision can be provided to your family in the event of your death.

It is recommended you discuss your wishes with your family. To register, you must be over 16 years of age.

Registration can be via any of the following methods:

* Print out the registration form from:

http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/public/services/aodr/files/medicare_aodr_code_d_1206.pdf
and send it to Medicare (address in on the form).

* Register online at <http://www.donatewest.health.wa.gov.au/home/index.cfm>

* Free call 1800 777 203 or

* Pick up a registration brochure at your local Medicare office or

* Email donatewest@health.wa.gov.au and ask for a registration form to be mailed to you
(remember to include your name and address)