‘Soft’ opt-out system for organ donation in Northern Ireland

BMA have long been campaigning for the introduction of “soft opt out” system for organ donation where there is ‘deemed consent’, a presumption in favour of consent for organ donation. Anyone who does not want to donate their organs can register their objection in advance. If an objection has not been registered, family members would still be given the opportunity to confirm whether the individual had any unregistered objection, as an extra safeguard, before any procedures go ahead.

You will be aware that in her speech at the Conservative party conference last week, Prime Minister Theresa May announced that such a system is to be introduced in England. This follows the introduction of a deemed consent system in Wales in December 2015, which has led to a rise in organ donations and an increase in the number of families agreeing to donations and an announcement by Ministers in Edinburgh in June of this year to introduce a “soft opt-out” system in Scotland.

Findings in Northern Ireland have shown that although almost everyone would accept an organ if they needed one, registrations account for just 41% of the population.

BMA welcomed the amendment made to the Health Miscellaneous Bill in 2016 to include a “duty to promote and annually report on transplantation” and we agree that ongoing organ donation awareness campaigns are crucial but in our opinion, on their own, they do not go far enough.

Given that Northern Ireland is now the only part of the UK which has not committed to an opt out system, that at present, around 200 people here are on the transplant waiting list and last year 12 people died waiting for an organ, we ask that your party would support legislation to introduce a soft out system to also be introduced here.

If you require any additional information about this, please do not hesitate to contact Bernadette Maginnis, Senior public affairs advisor on bmaginnis@bma.org.uk or 02890 269678.

Yours sincerely

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