



Knowledge of Organ and Tissue Donation within the Hospice Environment

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Background

The latest version of the Liverpool Care Pathway directs staff to confirm whether or not the dying patient has previously expressed a wish to donate organs. In order to be able to answer any questions that may arise as a result of such a discussion, staff require basic knowledge of organ and tissue donation. The subject is not routinely discussed at LOROS and very few patients donate.

Methods

A 19 item questionnaire based on the knowledge and attitude questionnaire developed by Vtris (1993) was sent to all doctors, nurses and healthcare assistants working at LOROS. The responses were analysed using Stata version 12.0.

All members of these staff groups were also invited to participate in focus groups, so that their knowledge could be explored in greater depth. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

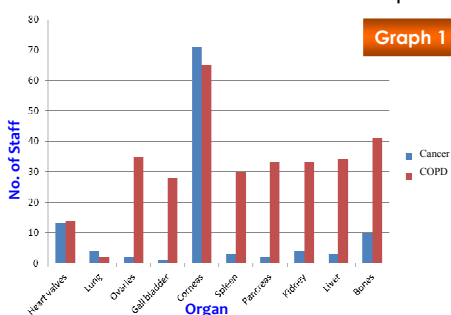
Aims

To assess the knowledge that medical and nursing staff in a large independent Hospice in the East Midlands have of organ and tissue donation.

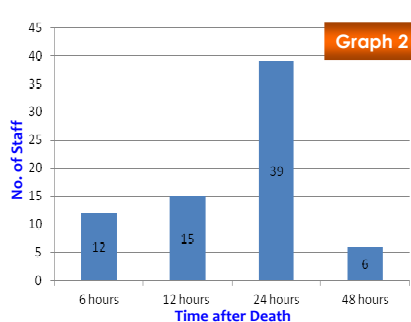
RESULTS:

- The response rate was 80% with 76/94 questionnaires completed, comprising responses from 18 Healthcare Assistants, 48 qualified Nurses and 10 Doctors. 29 people attended five focus groups.
- 35/76 people who replied had known someone (either on a personal or professional level) who had needed an organ donation.
- Most (71/76) staff realised that patients with metastatic malignant disease could donate their corneas for transplantation and some also thought that these patients could donate heart valves (13/76) and bones (10/76). Staff were less sure about what patients dying of non-malignant disease could donate (Graph 1).
- 39/76 people correctly realised that corneas needed to be retrieved within twenty four hours of death (Graph 2). 20/76 were unsure whether the procedure of organ and tissue donation would cause disfigurement of the body (Graph 3).

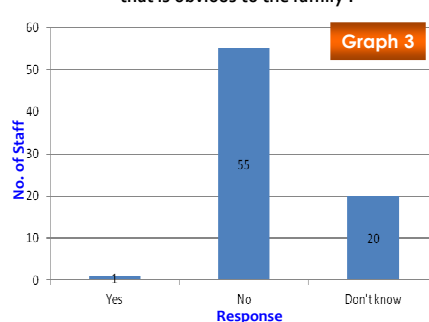
What do Hospice workers think patients dying from metastatic cancer or COPD can donate for transplantation?



How long after death can corneas be donated?



'Organ and tissue donation involves disfigurement that is obvious to the family'.



THE MAIN THEMES TO EMERGE FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS WERE:

- Issues around arranging organ donation and outcomes.
- Issues around discussing organ donation with patients and families.
- Issues around knowledge of what could be donated and what donated organs were used for.

Arranging organ donation and outcomes—Quotes

"So I made waves and people came. We were getting near the cut off time. The people I spoke to weren't helpful, but I said look this is really, really important for this patient, and they did it in the end, so that was good"

"We've had experience with a patient wanting to donate their body to medical science.....they had signed all the forms and everything....We were unsure what we needed to do, so we spent quite a long time researching that..."

Discussing organ donation with patients and families—Quotes

"I was once asked after a patient had died, their relatives brought me their donor card after death here at LOROS and they wanted us to do something but they brought it up after the death and they hadn't mentioned it before. They assumed we would know"

"I don't feel I can talk about donation because its unknown territory — I'd be worried I couldn't answer all the questions"

Knowledge of what could be donated and what donated organs were used for—Quotes

"Cancer patients can't donate anything"

"But what benefit does it give someone having someone's corneas? Does it give sight to someone?"

"Taking all those eyes—it would be nice to know if they are used or not"

Conclusion

This study has identified gaps in Hospice workers' knowledge of organ and tissue donation.

Almost all patients who die at LOROS are on the Liverpool Care Pathway, but the patients' feelings regarding organ or tissue donation are rarely determined and documented. This may be because staff believe that they have insufficient knowledge and resources to feel comfortable initiating and facilitating discussions around organ and tissue donation with patients and carers.

Acknowledgements

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Vtris M I Nursing knowledge and attitudes towards organ donation. J Transplant Coordinator 1993: 3:70-79