

Public support for use of human tissue in research has gone up

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UK public support for the use of human tissue in research has risen over the past decade, suggests a study published ahead of print in the *Journal of Clinical Pathology*.

This is despite the adverse publicity generated by the incidents at the Bristol Royal Infirmary and Liverpool's Alder Hey Hospital, which prompted new legislation to be drawn up (Human Tissue Act 2004).

The Act requires specific patient consent for the use of human tissue, except that taken during surgery and stored.

The authors repeated a survey they originally carried out in 1996 at a large teaching hospital in Sheffield, when they canvassed patients recovering from surgery for their views on the use and ownership of tissue removed during operations.

This time around, 220 patients undergoing surgery over a period of 11 weeks in 2005 were asked to take part in the survey.

They were given 10 potential options for the use of their tissue, including medical research, training, diagnostic purposes and transplantation.

They were also asked what they thought happened to tissue after it had been removed, who was responsible for examining it, and who owned it.

In all, 203 people completed the questionnaires, giving a response rate of 92%.

The percentage of patients who said they would be happy for their tissue to be used in research was higher than in the previous survey, with 96% in favour of this compared with 89% in 1996

Similarly, patients were very happy for their tissue to be used to help train medical students.

Most people knew that surgically removed tissue would be checked for disease, but many were unclear about who owned it.

But only 15% of patients correctly identified that no one owns tissue removed during an operation. Almost one in three (29%) believed the hospital owned it.

And almost one in four (23%) said that patients owned it, up from 10% in the previous survey.

Source: British Medical Journal

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