

Study finds young people lack knowledge to help lift organ donation

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New University of Otago research published in the *New Zealand Medical Journal* today shows that the young "organ donors of the future" lack the knowledge that could help lift New Zealand's rates of organ donation.

However, the survey of young people did demonstrate positive support for [organ donation](#).

Until now, there have been no New Zealand studies exploring what young people know about organ and tissue donation (OTD), meaning that little evidence on society's understanding of organ donation in New Zealand has been available to guide education campaigns or clinical interaction in this age group.

Yet these young people are the donors of tomorrow, says research lead author Dr Jon Cornwall from the Faculty of Law.

Dr Cornwall and his team surveyed 180 University of Otago students aged 19-25 in 2014, and found they had limited knowledge about organ donation. For example, most were not aware that simply because you are marked as a donor on your driver's licence, your family can still overrule that expressed wish. Nor did they know in what percentage of deaths donation was possible or viable.

These young people had limited awareness of the rarity of organ donation, and the significant need for organs, with current demand for organs in New Zealand far exceeding supply.

In New Zealand, only 31 to 46 people donated organs each year between 2008-2014. The consent for OTD following brain death in New Zealand is about 50 per cent, whereas in Australia it is higher at around 60 per cent. Dr Cornwall says the research into young peoples' knowledge and attitudes shows there is a need to have the discussion with young people about organ donation; explaining processes, consent issues and what is involved.

"We suspect the OTD topic is not something that New Zealand as a society thinks or talks about as a 'dinner table' conversation. But this conversation needs to happen within families to raise general awareness about organ donation and so that family members are informed about personal wishes, just in case the unthinkable happens.

"The findings also support proactive and positive engagement between clinicians and families when donation is a possibility, with young adults confirming their desire to have as much information as they can about the donation process if it is an option," he says.

He adds that the study's findings provide an insight into potential organ donation education requirements and establish a benchmark for future investigations.

"Findings are important in relation to the future of OTD in NZ as young adults who are knowledgeable on OTD are likely to serve as advocates for increasing the awareness and knowledge of others in the community."

Other findings were:

- That about half of the respondents would still donate a loved one's organs or tissues if the loved one had not indicated their preference or wishes, also supporting the necessity for the donation scenario to be discussed as part of family conversation.

- Most respondents supported OTD as being of benefit to society.
- Religious beliefs do not appear to be a barrier for OTD based on the findings – which was seen as not surprising given New Zealand's mostly secular society.
- Most participants were unaware of the significant need for organs

Provided by University of Otago

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