

One in ten people may opt out of proposed organ donor system

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A new study has revealed that around one in 10 people are considering opting out of a proposed new system that aims to increase organ donation by presuming consent.

The research, from the University of Stirling, found that those planning to opt-out of the new approach – earmarked for Scotland and England – reported stronger emotional barriers towards organ donation. These include discomfort at thinking about one's own death and [feelings](#) of disgust about organ donation.

The team says their findings suggest that campaigns targeting feelings and emotions, may be more effective than interventions that present facts.

Jordan Miller co-authored the study with Professor Ronan O'Carroll and Dr. Sinéad Currie, health psychologists from the Faculty of Natural Sciences, as part of her Ph.D.

"We found that participants who plan to opt-out of the proposed system reported heightened emotional barriers towards organ donation," Ms Miller said. "Concerns that organ donation would violate the physical integrity of the body was a particularly important barrier in this group."

"Our study considered a myth-busting strategy currently employed by the NHS – and used by other healthcare providers worldwide – where myths and misconceptions about organ donation are corrected with

factual information. We found that this approach had no effect on increasing donor intentions in those planning to opt-out."

Latest figures indicate that there are more than 6,000 people in the UK currently on the waiting list for an [organ transplant](#). However, a shortage of organs means that three people die every day while awaiting a transplant.

Although 90 percent of the UK population support organ donation, just 38 percent have signed up to the organ donor register. In an attempt to address this, Governments in Scotland and England are planning to follow Wales and introduce opt-out donor consent – which presumes consent unless a person chooses to opt-out.

Prior to the Stirling study, there had been limited research into the public attitudes and intentions regarding the proposed opt-out consent laws.

The researchers surveyed 1,202 people in the UK on their intentions under the proposed system – and found that 9.4 percent plan to opt-out, or are unsure of their decision. The team pointed out that, in reality, this number may be even higher as 70 percent of participants were already organ donors.

The survey found 66.1 percent would opt- in and 24.3 would give "deemed consent".

Ms Miller said the research suggested that organ donation campaigns could be more effective if they focus on feelings, rather than facts, in an attempt to overcome deep-set emotional beliefs and increase donor intentions.

She continued: "Communication campaigns designed to dispel harmful myths about organ donation are frequently used on [organ donation](#)

websites. However, our research has shown that presenting factual corrective information had no effect on donor intentions for those who plan to opt-out.

"Evidence has consistently shown that emotional barriers – or feelings – play the greatest role in influencing donor behaviours, however, the myth-busting campaign used by the NHS targets facts, rather than feelings. Therefore, interventions designed to target feelings and emotions may be more effective at increasing donor intentions."

She added: "Before the introduction of opt-out consent laws, evaluation of alternative strategies to increase [donor](#) intentions are required."

More information: Jordan Miller et al. 'What if I'm not dead?' - Myth-busting and organ donation, *British Journal of Health Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/bjhp.12344](https://doi.org/10.1111/bjhp.12344)

Provided by University of Stirling

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