

Organ Donation and Religious Beliefs

- All of the UK's major faiths including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Sikhism support organ donation and transplantation. Many actively promote it.
- Within each religion there are different schools of thought on donation, but all accept that it is down to individual choice.
- NHS Blood and Transplant works closely with faith leaders, and with their support produces leaflets explaining more about organ donation and religious beliefs.
- Anyone who has doubts as to whether their religion or faith allows them to donate is encouraged to seek advice from their local religious leader.
- Currently NHSBT does not record donors' religions on the NHS Organ Donor Register but anyone in favour of donation or joining the Register should inform their relatives of any beliefs they hold that reflect their religion so that this can be taken into consideration at the time donation is being discussed.

Buddhism

- There are no injunctions in Buddhism for or against organ donation.
- In some traditions, the moment of death is defined according to criteria which differ from those of modern Western medicine, and there are differing views as to the acceptability of organ transplantation.
- The needs and wishes of the dying person must not be compromised by the wish to save a life. Each decision will depend on individual circumstances.
- Central to Buddhism is a wish to relieve suffering and there may be circumstances where organ donation may be seen as an act of generosity. Where it is truly the wish of the dying person, it would be seen in that light.
- If there is doubt as to the teachings within the particular tradition to which a person belongs, expert guidance should be sought from a senior teacher within the tradition concerned.

Christianity

- The Christian faith is based upon the revelation of God in the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus taught people to love one another and to embrace the needs of others.
- Organ donation can be considered by Christians as a genuine act of love.

- Christians believe in eternal life, and preparing for death should not be a source of fear. Nothing that happens to our body, before or after death, can impact on our relationship with God.
- Ensuring that we are on the NHS Organ Donor Register and that relatives know of our wishes in advance will help to relieve loved ones of anxiety if the opportunity to donate arises.

Hinduism

- There are many references that support the concept of organ donation in Hindu scriptures.
- Daan is the original word in Sanskrit for donation, meaning selfless giving. In the list of the ten Niyamas (virtuous acts) Daan comes third.
- Life after death is a strong belief of Hindus and is an ongoing process of rebirth.
- Scientific and medical treatises (Charaka and Sushruta Samhita) form an important part of the Vedas. Sage Charaka deals with internal medicine while Sage Sushruta includes features of organ and limb transplants.

Judaism

- In principle Judaism sanctions and encourages organ donation in order to save lives (*pikuach nefesh* - the obligation to save life in jeopardy). This principle can override the Jewish objections to any unnecessary interference with the body after death and the requirement for immediate burial.
- Families may be concerned that giving consent for donation may not be consistent with the honour and respect that Jews believe is due to the dead (*kavod hamet*). Judaism considers each case as different, and recognises that any known wishes of the dead person can be valuable.
- In Judaism, whether or not the wishes of the dead person are known, it is widely recognised that families are entitled to decide for themselves; and that they will often wish to consult with their own experts in Jewish law and tradition before making a final decision.
- Judaism approaches the question of organ donation very much on a case-by-case basis.

Islam

- In Islam there are two schools of thought with regard to organ donation. The human body, whether living or dead, enjoys a special honour and is inviolable. Also, fundamentally, Islamic law emphasises the preservation of human life.

- The general rule that 'necessities permit the prohibited' (al-darurat tubih al-mahzurat), has been used to support human organ donation with regard to saving or significantly enhancing a life of another provided that the benefit outweighs the personal cost that has to be borne.
- In 1995 the UK-based Muslim Law (Shariah) Council resolved that the medical profession is the proper authority to define death, and that brain stem death constitutes the end of life for the purpose of organ transplantation.
- The Council supports organ transplantation as a means of alleviating pain or saving life on the basis of the rules of the Shariah.

Sikhism

- The Sikh philosophy and teachings place great emphasis on the importance of giving and putting others before oneself.
- Sikh Gurus devoted their lives for the benefit of humanity and some even sacrificed their lives looking after the welfare of others.
- Seva, or selfless services, is at the core of being a Sikh; to give without seeking reward or recognition and know that all seva is known to and appreciated by the Eternal. Seva can also be donation of one's organ to another.
- There are no taboos attached to organ donation in Sikhism nor is there a requirement that a body should have all its organs intact at or after death.
- The Sikh faith stresses the importance of performing noble deeds and there are many examples of selfless giving and sacrifice in Sikh teachings.