

Increasing awareness of need for organ donation



By **Leslie Morgan**, OBE DL
CEO, Durbin PLC

Leslie Morgan is a Fellow of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain

Durbin is often called upon to supply the fluids that live organs are transported in. From the first successful kidney transplant in 1954, organ donation became a phenomenon of the 20th century and today it is able to extend and enhance the lives of hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. However, many more lives around the world continue to be lost due to chronic diseases because patients are unsuccessful in finding essential matching donors or because the cost of transplantation is simply too expensive.

Figures show that one registered organ donor can save approximately eight lives and can on average increase the lives of a hundred people by means of tissue donation. In the Middle East, even though there have been positive improvements over the years, figures show there is still room for growth, particularly in encouraging more people to join organ donor registers now that awareness is increasing.

Whilst transplants enjoy a high success rate, doctors still face the battle of tackling organ rejection, infections and a lack of matching donors. Patients meanwhile similarly struggle with the shortage of donors along with long surgery waiting times.

The World Health Organisation (WHO)

has identified Oman, one of the oldest independent states in the Arab World, as one of six countries who are major organ importers in the world. Local sources also reveal that it is common for Omani patients to be exploited by corrupt dealers who can demand over \$50,000 for the illegal purchase of organs such as kidneys from countries such as Pakistan and China. Nonetheless, sympathy must be shown to the circumstances of these individuals as it can take months or even years to find a matching donor and yet many are not fully aware of the adverse effects an illegally sourced organ can have on their lives.

In many cases, surgeons involved in the transplantation of organs bought on the black market, are inexperienced individuals carrying out operations in improper environments. Patients are openly putting their lives at risk by exposing themselves to surgical complications and infections that can lead to death. It is also believed that the shortage of organs in the Middle East is partly due to religious views with Oman being one of the more traditional countries in the region. Omanis consider that the body of a deceased is sacred in Islam and these views are replicated in neighbouring countries such as Saudi Arabia. There are also many misconceptions regarding the procedures of organ donation. A large number of families of potential organ donors think that the body of the donor will be left disfigured despite organs being removed surgically in a manner that is similar to any other procedure that an individual

may undergo. Doctors are of course always committed to respect an individual's body even after death.

The main obstacles that are apparent in the Middle East surrounding organ transplantation are: the need for matching donors, a general lack of knowledge by many people on the topic and religious beliefs about a deceased body. That said, it is clear that over recent developments in educating people about organ donation have made an impact. This has been mainly led by a number of organisations, such as The Middle East Society for Organ Transplantation (MESOT), which aims to promote and encourage education in the Middle East.

In the UAE, Federal Law on organ transplantation formulated by the National Organ Transplant Committee (NOTC) incorporates global best practice in the field of organ donation and transplantation that is fully compliant with Shariah principles.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia aims to take the lead in making human organ donations easier by declaring on new driving licenses whether the driver accepts or refuses to donate organs after death, and Oman is launching a new organ donor card campaign for patients. Hopefully other campaigns will also be launched and further progress made to encourage more organ donors to come forward and register across the wider region.

Any actions that can increase legitimate organ donation and eliminate purchasing from the black market can only be a good thing. MEH

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- Web address: www.durbinglobal.com
- Email: bd@durbinglobal.com