

This response was submitted to the consultation held by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics on Give and take? Human bodies in medicine and research between April 2010 and July 2010. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

Andrew Burrow

Dear Sirs,

I heard with amazement a radio interview seeking views on various incentives for getting citizens to sign up for organ donation.

The ethics of this are clearly complicated. However, it consider going down this road is clearly wrong whilst the current approach to voluntary "signing up" is so woefully inadequate.

Let me elaborate. I am sending this note to the Nuffield on your general e mail address because the news item said that you were seeking views. Well you have not yet set up the system for receiving views despite having initiated the radio interview to announce the consultation. Well certainly Google could not find any dedicated method for communication with you on this issue. This is typical of the inadequate approach regarding communication on organ donation.

I have recently given blood. The system is a disgrace with the staff not knowing the rules on giving blood after trips to the USA. The rules listed on the paperwork were not upheld by the staff at the local donation centre and I was initially turned away. There was no communication about organ donation at the blood donation centre as far as I could see and certainly no active attempt to sign up the people waiting. What an opportunity missed.

It would be very easy to improve organ donation sign up. You need to do just two things. Firstly communicate it at points where the public will read such communication and secondly make it very easy for them to do, ideally then and there and not later when the pressures of their life divert their attention. In conceptual terms you have to make it an "impulse purchase" and use the impulse purchase techniques used by the super markets.

Now clearly this is a public good and major companies can be brought on board to help lest their failure to help is publicised but they will probably do it for positive reasons anyway. Some options include

1. Simple point of sale literature with paperwork forms plus details of the organ donation web site at super market check outs. Queuing is boring, people will read stuff then and there. (Post Offices and many other mass outlets could also be included)

2. Seek links via other forms that people complete to allow a cross linking between that application and entering the name on the organ donation list. Credit cards, unemployment pay, TV licenses, driving licenses, signing up for a Doctor or dentist etc the list of places where we give our name and address etc is almost endless. If it is seen as a civic duty and something that individuals can do to help, then people will accept double purpose in such applications - the primary purpose and the secondary purpose of signing up for organ donation. There are no data protection issues as long as people understand what they are signing up to and it is a voluntary option on the form, so lets not have data protection act as a barrier.

No incentives should be given until all other reasonable routes have been tried. The ethical issues are just too great that we go down the incentive route before we try some simple communication approaches.

I hope this is helpful.

Kind regards

Andrew Burrow