

Introduction to these resources

Scientific developments are leading to more and more possibilities for using parts of the human body in medical treatment or for research which aims to find new and better treatments. Meanwhile, high levels of disease associated with changing lifestyles, such as obesity, diabetes and conditions associated with excess alcohol consumption, as well as people living longer, means that more and more people need organ transplants. In the UK today, a person is far more likely to need a transplant than to become a donor. Around 8,000 people are waiting for an organ transplant and a lack of access to tissue is holding back research into possible treatments for conditions such as cancer.

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics report *Human bodies: donation for medicine and research* (2011) considered the ethical and social issues that arise when people are asked to donate organs and tissue to benefit others. It asked two questions:

- How far should society go in trying to encourage people to donate their organs or tissue?
- What is the role of the government and others in responding to the demand for bodily material?

How does donation work in the UK?

Organ donation in the UK is voluntary and coordinated by the NHS Blood and Transplant. Anyone who wishes to donate can sign up to the Organ Donor Register (www.organdonation.nhs.uk). There is no minimum age for signing up, but young people are encouraged to discuss their wishes with their close family before doing so. Organs that are donated after death go into a common 'pool' and are then allocated to someone who is waiting for a donation based on how well they match the donor and how urgent their need for a transplant is. A person who donates while they are alive can choose who they donate to, for example a relative or someone they know. It is against the law to offer or accept financial reward to donate blood, tissue or organs for the treatment of others.

How to use this resource

This resource includes:

- a summary of what can be donated and types of donation
- an introduction to ethical values in organ donation
- an introduction to an 'intervention ladder' which helps to decide what courses of action should be used to encourage donation
- two case studies and links to other resources for further discussion

These can be used together or separately, and in any order. We have suggested some links to the curriculum for Key Stage 4 and Secondary 3.

Further reading is available to download on our website:

- Human bodies: donation for medicine and research – [full report](#)
- Human bodies: donation for medicine and research - [summary](#)