

1 Cornea donation – giving someone the gift of sight

From our experience at the hospice we know that organ/tissue donation can help patients and families feel comforted by knowing that they have given hope to others, and that some good has come out of their loss. However, we also realise that not everyone feels comfortable with taking such a step.

If you are reading this leaflet, you may be thinking about organ donation. Surveys show that although 70% of the population in this country say that they would be glad to donate an organ, only 15% actually register as a donor. This may be because they don't get round to it, or perhaps because they're not sure what's involved.

2 Referral for cornea donation

Here are some facts that may help you make up your mind:

- although people with cancer cannot donate internal organs (like hearts and lungs) after death, they can sometimes donate their cornea (the transplant tissue that covers the front of the eye)
- the donation of a cornea will enable someone's sight to be restored or improved-one donation can help up to four people
- if you decide you wish to go ahead, a consent form will need to be signed (although there is no legal requirement to do so)
- after your death, an ocular (eye) donor coordinator will contact your next of kin to obtain further information about your medical history and consent before the donation can go ahead
- the removal of corneas is carried out with the same care and respect as any other procedure – it does not prevent relatives saying goodbye or affect funeral arrangements and is done at the hospice.

If you have any questions that aren't answered in this leaflet, we hope you will talk them over with a member of staff who will be glad to help. Some people may find it helpful to discuss this matter with their religious leader before making up their mind.

3 What other tissue can be donated?

People who are dying from conditions other than cancer may be able to donate other tissue:

- **bone** can be used to help improve and restore mobility and can prevent limb amputation in bone cancer patients
- **heart valves** can be transplanted to save the lives of patients suffering from diseased or damaged valves, and young children born with malformed hearts
- **skin** can help to save the lives of people with severe burns as a skin graft helps to reduce pain and prepares underlying tissue for later treatment – it also helps to reduce scarring, but it can take a number of skin grafts to help a severely affected patient
- **tendons** can be used to restore mobility in patients with badly damaged knee joints
- **the whole body** can also be donated to medical science.

Referrals and consent are the same as for corneal donation but your body will need to be transferred to a local mortuary to enable retrieval of the donated tissue. The cost of transportation is met by your next of kin.

It is really important for your care that the information you give us is as full and accurate as possible.

StChristopher's

Cornea and tissue donation

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