



Organ supplies for transplant operations are at an all-time low. Today, the Press and Journal launches a new campaign — the Gift of Life — in an attempt to boost both local and national figures. But we need your support



The Gift of Life

A DRASTIC drop in the number of people signing up for donor cards is risking the lives of those waiting in vain for a transplant. Three years ago, Grampian and the Highlands held the best UK record of organ donors. The amount of people (1,800) in the regions pledging to donate their organs accounted for almost half of all donors in the UK (4,000).

Tayside also had a reputable record since a local register was set up in the region six years ago. But numbers have since plummeted — organ supplies are at an all-time low, while the waiting list of people needing life-saving transplants continues to rise. Leading Aberdeen consultant Jermund Engeset said the situation has never been as bad as the last two years. "Three years ago, we were the biggest

single hospital in the UK for supplying hearts and livers so the drop in donors is obviously influencing what is happening in other centres," he said. "But there is little doubt that the number of potential donors are there." Fiona Jack, a donor-co-ordinator in Tayside — the only Scottish region to hold its own register — said an increase in donors would mean that those awaiting transplants had more chance of find-

ing suitable organs. She welcomed the Press and Journal's Gift of Life campaign by saying that anything which would encourage people to come forward was important. "We have 41,000 names on our own register, but that is only 10% of the population in Tayside so we still have a lot of work to do." "It is important for people to know that one person who donates organs can help

several people. It is often the case that relatives don't have a particular reason for refusing organ donations — they just don't like the idea and wonder what we do with the organs. "But a transplant is carried out like any other surgical operation with a full medical team, just like you would have during life. It has to be because it wouldn't work for the recipient." Ann Humphrey, a staff grade nurse at

Aberdeen Royal Hospital Trust's renal unit, agreed. She said that relatives who had refused permission often get in touch with the hospital afterwards to apologise as, on reflection, they realise that donating organs is not so bad. But by that time, it is too late. "It is an emotional decision for most relatives, but if people have decided beforehand, it makes it easier."

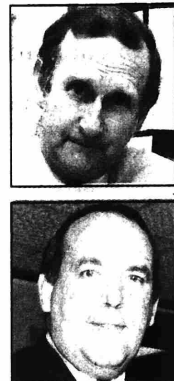
We're behind the P&J — all the way

S COTTISH health minister Lord Fraser has given his full support to the Press and Journal's campaign to increase awareness of the need for organ donors. Lord Fraser, who launched a similar campaign last March and was involved in setting up the NHS Organ Donor Register, said it was important to raise awareness of the need for more people to carry donor cards. "The most positive thing they can do to ensure the 'gift of life' is to fill in the coupon so that their name and donation wishes can be included on the NHS register of organ donors, which we have recently established, and let their relatives know what they have done." Alan Reid, director of public affairs at Aberdeen Royal Hospitals Trust also congratulated the Press and Journal for taking the initiative to launch the Gift of Life. He said: "Anything that will bring forward more organs for donation will obviously help or save the lives of others. Congratulations to the P&J for helping to do this." Leading Aberdeen consultant Jermund Engeset said it was important to get the Gift of Life campaign going as an increase in organ donors could mean the difference between life and death for people awaiting transplants. "We hope that by the Press and Journal taking on the Gift of Life campaign, there will be an initiative from relatives of those who are dying. "It is not a pleasant decision to make, but if relatives come forward and give permission, it can save a lot more grief."



Inverurie mum Maureen Mitchell (left) cuddles daughter Rachael, forever grateful to the life-saving heart transplant operation she underwent just weeks after giving birth.

YOUR STORY
ARE you waiting for an organ transplant and what would it mean to you if the right match was found? Perhaps you have had a transplant and never looked back since. Or maybe you decided to carry a donor card for a personal reason and now encourage others to follow suit. If you have a story to tell, contact the Press and Journal newsdesk on (0224) 690222, extension 3311.



"Congratulations to the Press and Journal for helping to bring forward more organs for donations."
— ALAN REID, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, ABERDEEN ROYAL HOSPITALS TRUST



"By taking on the Gift of Life campaign, we hope there will be an initiative from relatives of those who are dying."
— CONSULTANT JERMUND ENGESET



"I know the shortage of organs will be of concern to Press and Journal readers."
— SCOTTISH HEALTH MINISTER LORD FRASER

Registering your wishes

O NLY six weeks ago, the Government launched a major initiative in support of transplantation — the NHS Organ Donor Register. It is the UK's only national register and aims to increase the number of donor organs available for transplant by increasing the opportunities to register. The register — a computerised database — was set up to complement the donor card, enabling transplant co-ordinators to present convincing evidence to relatives of the donor's wishes.

Relatives refusing consent is believed to lead to as many as 26% of potential donors being lost to transplantation. It is hoped that as more people learn about the register, it will widen public awareness and support for organ donation. More than 40,000 people have recorded their wishes on the register to donate organs. The register, which is maintained at the UK Transplant Support Service Authority (UKTSSA) in Bristol, is accessible to transplant co-ordinators throughout the UK 24-hours every day.

■ The Driving and Vehicle Licencing Agency (DVLA) computers have been connected to UKTSSA, with all driving-licence application forms and change-of-address forms having been revised to allow drivers to indicate their wishes to donate their organs.
■ The Family Health Services Authority is also co-operating by piloting a similar connection between the new network of computers connecting GP practices with the NHS Organ Donor Register.

WHAT TO DO

The Press and Journal will print a coupon to coincide with the campaign, which readers wishing to become donors should complete and send to the address given. In return, we will send you an official donor card, along with a car sticker, and record your wishes with the NHS Organ Donor Register — the UK's only national register. All information is confidential, and if at any time you change your mind, your name can be removed from the register. Anyone of any age can become a donor — corneas have been

used from donors over the age of 90 — while donors can opt for any part of their body to be used for donation, or for specific organs only, in the event of their death. At present, the law still requires permission from relatives before organs can be donated, even if the person had registered as a donor. This is why it is important that you tell relatives of your wishes and that you carry your donor card at all times so that the decision is made easier.

Donor cards are lifeline tickets


H EART transplant woman Maureen Mitchell will spend the rest of her life on steroids. But she is the first to admit that the drugs, which stop her body rejecting her new heart, are a small price to pay for being alive. The Inverurie mother-of-two underwent a three-hour life-saving operation at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle, just weeks after giving birth to second daughter Rachael in June. Her heart became enlarged shortly after giving birth in Aberdeen. The condition is very rare, in childbirth and is thought to be linked to viral illness. Maureen, who lives at Chelsea Road with partner John Metcalf and their other daughter Victoria (2), has given her full backing to the Press and Journal organ donor campaign. "There is definitely a need to raise awareness and for more people to become organ donors," she said. "I was not ill before the transplant, but a lot of people who have transplants have waited a very long time. "It was a matter of life and death as far as I was concerned. If I had not had the transplant, I would not be here today." Maureen has no wish to know who her donor was, but said she will be forever grateful to the family for making the painful final decision. "It must be a very hard decision to make, but it is a very important one," she said. "Before my operation, neither myself nor my family ever really thought about it, but now they all carry cards. "I think there is more awareness among youngsters, but it applies to everyone and the more people who carry cards the better."

B U S I N E S S M A N Mike Stewart has had his life turned upside down since he started dialysis treatment around 17 months ago. He is no longer able to drink or smoke, holidays are out of the question and some days he is so ill that he cannot work. But even worse has been the recent news that two of his three children also suffer from the incurable hereditary disease which has changed his life. Haulage contractor Mr Stewart, Lyne of Skene, was diagnosed as having polycystic kidneys in 1985. "It was a great shock, but it was terrible when we found out three months ago that the kids had it too," he said. "Hopefully, they will never have to go through with dialysis as it tends not to affect people until later life." His condition started to deteriorate more than a year ago. He now spends six hours, three times a week receiving dialysis at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. "The treatment leaves you totally drained as it does the work of your kidneys in five hours instead of two days," he said. "There are no two days the same — sometimes I'm fine and the next I feel awful."

Mr Stewart, who is allowed to drink just 500ml of fluid a day, has seen a lot of people getting new kidneys during his time on dialysis. But because he has the rare blood group, B positive, the chances of a kidney coming up to match his blood and tissue types are few and far between. He and wife Vivien (33) had never thought about being organ donors until Mike became ill. "People just don't know how hard it is and it is not until you go through it yourself that you do realise," said Mrs Stewart. "The worst part for me was not knowing what was ahead of us and the sudden changes in Mike's temperament when he is not feeling well can be hard." Her husband said: "I know there are some people worse than me, but it can be really hard to cope with sometimes and I tend to sit and think 'maybe today', but it never is. "Anyone who makes the decision to donate their relative's organs is really brave, but it can mean the difference between life and death for so many people. "Having a transplant would totally change my life. It would be nice to have a drink — even if it was just water."

F R A S E R B U R G H couple Mary and George Main had talked together about carrying donor cards and agreed that if one of them died, the other was to give their organs for transplant purposes. But George never dreamed that he would be faced with the decision so soon. Mary (42), a business manager at a local travel agent, died of a brain haemorrhage in May, two days after being admitted to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. However, when doctors broached the subject of using his wife's organs, George had little hesitation in giving an answer. Mary's wish was granted and, because of her decision, she gave life to four people. Her heart went to the Papworth Hospital transplant centre, a 59-year-old woman received her liver at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital, a Scotsman received one of her kidneys and Fochabers man Charles Campbell was given her other kidney. Her eyes were to be used for cornea transplants. George, a self-employed painter and decorator, said: "My wife had clear-cut views on donor cards and was so definite about that kind of thing. "We had talked it over about 10 years ago when she persuaded me to carry a card. Your body is not much use after you die so if you can help somebody else, you have done something." At a time of personal tragedy for his family, George said the decision was made easier because he and Mary, who had donated 48 pints of blood as a donor and did a parachute jump to raise funds for Fraserburgh Hospital, had made their wishes known to each other. "It's best if you can discuss it beforehand as it can save a lot of heartbreak at the time. I asked Mary's parents out of courtesy, but we all knew it was what she wanted. "People have said to me that it was a brave decision to make, but it was Mary who was the brave person." He added: "Donor cards are important because, if a person dies, it states clearly that he or she wants their organs to be donated."





Donor Card

I would like to help someone to live after my death.

Let your relatives know your wishes.

I request that after my death

*A. my *kidneys, *corneas, *heart, *lungs, *liver, *pancreas be used for transplantation, or

*B. any part of my body be used for the treatment of others

(DELETE AS APPROPRIATE)

Signature _____ Date _____

Full name _____ (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Address _____ Postcode _____

Daytime telephone _____

Date of birth _____ Gender M F (please tick)

In the event of my death, if possible contact:

Name _____ Tel. _____

To receive your Donor Card, and to record your wishes with the NHS Organ Donor Register, send completed coupon to:

Press and Journal Gift of Life
Lang Stracht, Mastrick
Aberdeen. AB9 8AF

Please make sure that your family and close friends know of your wishes.

Press and Journal
Gift of Life

COMING UP TOMORROW:

- Anatomy of a transplant — we give a step-by-step guide on what happens when organs are donated for a transplant
- The mother of one of the youngest children to have a successful liver transplant tells their story