



Evaluation of the Human Transplantation (Wales) Act: NHS Wales Staff Survey Wave 2

Executive Summary

1. Background, research aims and methodology

- 1.1 On the 1st December 2015, the Human Transplantation (Wales) Act came into full effect, introducing a soft opt out system for consent to organ and tissue donation. In light of the change to the organ and tissue donation system, the Welsh Government commissioned GfK to carry out research to help understand NHS staff views on the change. The objectives of the project, which is part of a wider programme of research and evaluation, were to:
- Understand attitudes, expectations and level of knowledge about the new system
 - Identify staff whose work may be impacted by the introduction of the new system
 - Measure changes over time in the views of NHS staff and the expected impact on their work
 - Identify changes to working practices as a result of the implementation of the Act
 - Identify any unexpected issues caused by the move to the soft opt out system
- 1.2 A baseline survey was conducted with staff in December 2013 and January 2014 (i.e. before the change in the system had been implemented) and a second wave of fieldwork was carried out between November 2016 and January 2017 (i.e. after the law had come into force).
- 1.3 Fieldwork was conducted by Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) and questionnaires were designed by GfK in close consultation with the Welsh Government. Interviews were conducted with NHS staff in their workplace.
- 1.4 Data were weighted at the analysis stage to ensure findings were representative of all NHS staff within the occupations included in the survey, and ensure Health Board regions were in-line with the national profile. The same weighting was applied to both waves.

2. Key findings

2.1 Overall, levels of awareness and support for the change to the organ donation system were high and significant increases were evident since the Wave 1 survey.

Awareness and support

2.2 Positively, the level of awareness of the change to the organ donation consent system has increased since Wave 1. The vast majority of staff said they were aware of the change (96% W2 compared with 89% W1). Levels of awareness have increased most notably among GPs (100% W2, compared with 93% W1) and hospital nurses who did not work in either A&E or ITU (98% W2 compared with 86% W1).

2.3 Levels of NHS staff support for the change in the legislation has also risen with more than four-in-five (85%) now in favour of the change (71% W1). The proportion of staff who felt they needed more information to decide whether they supported the change in legislation has halved (22% W1 against only 11% W2).

2.4 Staff were asked about their current personal status in relation to organ donation and the change to the consent system. Only 3% said that were registered to opt out i.e. they would not be a donor, while nearly a quarter said they were either considering their options or had not thought about it.

2.5 Positively, four fifths (80%) of staff said that they had at some point discussed their decision about whether to become a donor with a family member.

Knowledge of change to organ donation system

2.6 Along with increases in awareness and support for the change in legislation, levels of self-rated knowledge have also risen. Four fifths (80%) said at Wave 2 that they knew at least a fair amount about the change to the organ donation system (up from 57% at the first wave). Increases in levels of self-rated knowledge were especially notable among GPs (79% W2 versus 51% W1); hospital nurses and doctors not working in A&E or ITU (78% W2 versus 39% W1 for nurses and 77% W2 versus 43% W1 for doctors).

2.7 Attitudes to the change in the organ donation system have remained positive and, when compared to the previous wave, stable. More than four fifths agreed that the new soft opt out for Wales will result in more lives being saved (85%) and that the system maintains freedom of choice because anyone can opt out from organ donation if they want to (93%). However, as in the first wave, hospital doctors working in A&E or ITU had the lowest proportion agreeing that the new soft opt out for Wales will result in more lives being saved (73% compared with 86% among other staff groups).

2.8 There is evidence to suggest that some staff may be misinterpreting the soft opt out message with regard to the role of the family. There was a decline in the proportion of staff who thought that the family will have a role to play in the organ donation process (84% W2 compared with 92% W1) and that if the family is in distress over the decision to donate, clinicians will not proceed (58% W2 compared with 74% W1).

2.9 However, that being said there is indicative evidence to suggest that the letter of the law may not be followed entirely on the ground in A&E departments. Among hospital doctors working in A&E or ITU the proportion who said it was true that the family can override the wishes of the deceased has increased from a quarter (28%) to a half (50%) – please note this finding is indicative due to small base sizes.

Answering questions

- 2.10 Levels of confidence in answering questions from the general public and patients about the new organ donation system have increased. Overall three quarters of staff (75%) said they were at least fairly confident in answering questions (rising from 62%). The proportion of staff who said they were very confident has doubled over the three years (from 6% W1 to 12% W2).
- 2.11 As seen at Wave 1, confidence increased with knowledge, with four fifths of those who said they knew at least a fair amount about the change to the organ donation consent system saying they were confident answering questions (83%, compared with 46% who did not know much or anything at all).
- 2.12 The proportion of staff who said they would contact a member of the organ donation team/staff, if a patient or member of the public wanted to speak to someone about the organ donation process, has increased to nearly two thirds (64% W2, rising from 54%). As seen in the first survey, staff who worked in A&E or ITU were the most likely to mention contacting the organ donation team/staff (90% for both doctors and specialist nurses).
- 2.13 The most commonly mentioned sources of information on organ donation included websites/helplines (47%), the organ donation team/staff (26%) and the Local Health Board (intranet, newsletter) (21%).

Impact on job

- 2.14 Now that the change to the organ donation system has been implemented there has been a significant increase in the proportion of staff who said that the change did not impact on their job (88% W2 versus 57% at W1). Among those staff for whom the change had an impact, the most commonly mentioned issue was time spent answering questions from patients and families of patients.

3. Conclusions and considerations

- 3.1 The change to the organ donation consent system has been well received by the vast majority of NHS staff in Wales. Awareness of the change to the system has increased across all staff groups since wave one but most noticeably among staff groups who do not have direct dealings with the organ donation process. Support for the change in the law is strong and rose between the two waves of the staff survey.
- 3.2 While self-rated knowledge of the organ donation system has increased among all staff since Wave 1, it has risen most notably among those who do not work in A&E or ITU. However, there does appear to be a need for more education or clarification for staff on the role of the family in the new soft opt out organ donation process. While levels of confidence in answering questions about the organ donation system have increased significantly since Wave 1, understanding the role of the family has not stood up well between the two waves. It may therefore be important for the Welsh Government to consider strengthening messaging about the role of the family for certain staff groups, including GPs.
- 3.3 General attitudes to change to the organ donation system have remained positive and fewer staff, compared with Wave 1, now felt that the soft opt out system gives the Government too much control.
- 3.4 The vast majority of staff have indicated that the change in law has not impacted on their job, despite a considerable proportion expecting it to when asked in Wave 1. For those staff

for whom the change has had an impact, the most commonly mentioned issue was time spent answering questions from patients and families of patients.

- 3.5 Occupational groups who were furthest away from the organ donation process were the least aware, knowledgeable and confident about answering questions at Wave 1, although at Wave 2 we have seen significant increases across these aspects for most staff.
- 3.6 Overall, hospital doctors who do not work in A&E or ITU tend to be the least engaged with organ donation; they were the least likely of all occupation groups to have discussed organ donation with their family. However, among this group, there has been a significant increase in self-rated knowledge and confidence in answering questions between waves 1 and 2.

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Available at: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/evaluation-human-transplantation-wales-act/?lang=en>

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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