

The Northern Echo

The North's campaigning newspaper

Founded 1870 Issue No 45,181

COMMENT

Reminder of public effort

THE rescue efforts that helped save lives and property across the flood-hit north this month have provided heart-warming displays of community spirit.

By midday yesterday, York City Council had to turn away volunteers offering to help fill and distribute sandbags after they became inundated by offers of help.

It was a timely reminder that the most effective way to overcome disaster is by a concerted public effort.

It also requires substantial public funding.

The Government, however, seems to see things differently.

The ongoing cuts programme, which David Cameron has led since he became Prime Minister in 2010, is based on the idea that we can manage with fewer public services.

During his visit to York Mr Cameron defended Government funding for flood defences and denied accusations made by some council leaders that there was a north-south divide in efforts to prevent flooding.

The Environment Agency has issued more flood warnings as the next bout of heavy rain and high winds is forecast to batter our region. It also called for a complete rethink of the UK's defences, saying that better waterproofing of homes and improved warning systems would be vital for tackling future weather extremes.

This will cost public money, but the cost of the floods is enormous too.

Economists believe storms Eva and Desmond could wipe 0.2 per cent off the economy, small businesses will go under, and there will be an estimated £1.5bn insurance bill.

We commend all members of the public and emergency services who waded in to assist rescue and clean-up attempts.

But the Government must take a lead to ensure we have a resilient and adequately-funded flood strategy in place.

What do you think?
echo@nne.co.uk

Write to: The Editor, Peter Barron, Hear All Sides, The Northern Echo, PO Box 14, Priestgate, Darlington, DL1 1NF.

Fax: 01325-360754

email: echo@nne.co.uk

The Northern Echo Daily average audience

Print **79,670**

Source: JICREG & ABC Jul-Dec 2013

Online **33,990**

Source: ABCE Jul-Dec 2013

TOTAL **113,660**

QUALITY

If you have any comments or suggestions about the print quality of today's copy of **The Northern Echo**, please contact our customer care department on 01325-505151.

A gift of life



With 7,500 people on the waiting list in the UK, North-East GP **Zak Uddin** says registering as a potential donor has never been more important

THIS month Wales became the first country in the United Kingdom to adopt the "opt out" policy for organ donation. This means any adult, who has lived in the country for more than 12 months who dies and whose organs may be suitable for transplantation, is presumed to have given consent for organ procurement, unless they have specifically stated otherwise.

While this has been met with concern from several authorities, with one religious leader even stating that it may turn "volunteers into conscripts", the concept is not new, and is employed successfully in several countries in Europe and further afield, without any upset from the population and importantly, greater numbers of organs and tissues becoming available for transplant.

In the UK currently there are more than 7,500 adults and children awaiting a transplant. A patient suffering end stage renal disease, needing a kidney transplant will wait an average of over a hundred days for a suitable organ. The demand for kidneys is higher than for any other organ. The wait for a heart is even longer.

Patients with end stage heart failure, either due to coronary heart disease or dilated cardiomyopathy, where the heart is so stretched it can no longer pump blood effectively, can expect a wait of more than 400 days for an adult, and 200 for a child.

In this time, patients become steadily weaker and less suitable to undertake the massive stresses placed on the body by the surgery involved in receiving a transplant.

Every week, three people in the UK die waiting for an organ to become available.

Organs may become available in three ways. If a person suffers catastrophic brain injury, for example massive stroke, once declared brain dead, their organs may be removed, while the heart is still beating, supported by an artificial ventilator.

People who die in hospital after their heart stops beating, can also be donors. The newest addition is that of living donors, whereby a person may donate a kidney to a member of their own family, or a stranger, if they are a match. There have been trials where living individuals have donated a portion of a lung, although this is not currently available in the UK.

Interestingly, 90 per cent of UK residents interviewed on the subject of organ donation replied in the affirmative when asked whether they would donate.

A similar percentage agreed they would accept an organ if needed. However only 30 per cent of UK citizens currently hold an organ donor card. There is no limit to how old you can be, should you wish to sign up, although organs are generally taken from donors less than 70-years-old, to increase the chance of success.

The organs from a single donor may save the lives of up to eight separate individuals.



REGISTER: A person signing up for an NHS Donor card

Indeed even body tissues such as corneas, heart valves, bone, tendons and cartilage can be used from patients of any age, and can be removed up to 24 hours after death.

The majority of people receiving sight restoring corneal surgery in the UK are in the age group 70-80, with most of the corneas supplied originating from donors of a similar age.

It is also very easy to sign up to the register. There are several ways including online, via text, when you renew your driving licence or road tax as well as by indicating your wishes to your GP.

Although some people cite religious or cultural objections to organ donation, most major religions including Catholicism and Judaism have expressed a positive attitude to organ donation and the gift of life.

People afraid they or their loved ones will be treated with disrespect or disfigured when their organs are removed need not be. All donors are treated with the utmost respect, by highly skilled and dedicated surgical teams, where the aim is to carefully and

appropriately remove an organ or organs which may prolong and increase the quality of life of one or several recipients.

In addition, the diagnosis of brain death is always made separately, by two senior level intensive care doctors, who are entirely distinct from the transplant team.

In summary, whether the best way is opt in or opt out is still open to debate. Spain, the country often cited as having the most successful transplant programme, pursues an "opt out" policy.

However the president of the Spanish National Transplant Organisation has opined that the success of their programme may not be primarily due to their legislation, and more to do with the open discourse between people and their families regarding their final wishes.

Ultimately no one ever expects to either need an organ or to be in the position of being a donor. But with the odds of needing an organ greater than those of donating one, it may be time individuals made their wishes more explicit.

In the UK currently there are more than 7,500 adults and children awaiting a transplant

Dr Zak Uddin