

Dr. Wendy Walker and Professor Magi Sque

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Title: Recognising the gift of organ and tissue donation: an evidence-based approach

Objectives

1. To describe the meaning of recognition for donor families.
2. To illustrate the creation of a public memorial, from conception to design.

Method

This presentation draws on the findings of a qualitative study, designed to elicit donor families' views and preferences on appropriate ways of personally and publicly recognising the gift of organ and tissue donation. To our knowledge, this was one of the first studies to examine this important issue in detail. Our study sample comprised bereaved, adult family members, who gave consent to organ and/or tissue donation from a deceased relative at an Acute NHS Trust in the Midlands, UK. Three participants from two donor families participated in a face-to-face interview. Two donor families provided a written response to pre-determined interview questions. Data were subjected to conventional content analysis. This involved a systematic process of applying codes to the text and grouping the data into categories and themes. The study received ethical approval.

Results

The findings of our exploratory investigation established the meaning of recognition for participant donor families and identified ways in which recognition may be realised. Donor families indicated unanimous support for organ and tissue donation to be formally recognised by the hospital where their relative died. An interesting observation was the extent to which families represented their experience of donation when deciding on the physical, emotional and relational qualities of a memorial design. For example, an association with nature seemed contiguous with the symbolism of life, and several of the participants were of the opinion that the memorial should transmit a sense of joy and pride. Participants identified three functions of a public memorial; recognition, remembrance and raising public awareness about organ and tissue donation. Facilitators of the donation process were identified as also worthy of recognition.

Conclusion

The concept of recognition has an important functional meaning in the context of deceased donation. Involving donor families in the design of a public memorial provides a means of expressing recognition and ensures a fitting tribute. Further research is recommended to test the efficacy of the different forms of recognition in the public domain.