



Are there barriers to rural families having discussions about their organ and tissue donation wishes?



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Mary Campbell, Northern NSW LHD
mary.campbell@ncahs.health.nsw.gov.au

Background: Organ transplantation is the definitive treatment for many patients with end-stage organ failure. Australia however, has a persistently low donation rate, which results in many Australian's dying before transplantation.

In New South Wales (NSW) in 2011, 31% of families for whom consent was requested, declined permission for their loved one to become an organ donor. However, evidence suggests that when families have had a memorable discussion about their organ donation wishes, they are more likely to support their loved ones wish to become an organ donor.

Aims:

- * To identify if barriers exist which prevent or inhibit families from holding a memorable discussion about their organ donation wishes.
- * To identify factors that facilitates organ donation discussions within families.

Methods: Four focus groups were conducted in rural NSW, incorporating a continuum of ages from senior school children to retired seniors. The focus groups included year 10 and 11 students, sterilisation technicians employed in the Central Sterilizing Supply Unit (CSSU) of a local hospital, university lecturers from Southern Cross University (SCU) and members from the University Third Age (U3A).

The senior students and the sterilisation technicians had been involved in an organ donation education session prior to participating in the focus group, while the university lecturers and members of U3A had not been involved in an educational session prior to participating in the focus group. The focus group data was transcribed and coded to identify key themes using an interpretative phenomenology process.

Results: The identified barriers to family discussion about organ donation wishes were lack of knowledge about organ donation, geographical distribution of family members, the hectic pace of family life and age. The findings also showed that school children and adults were able to initiate family discussion with ease once they had been involved in an education session.

Conclusion: Despite the barriers, family discussions are facilitated when individuals have participated in an education session and given the opportunity to ask questions.

For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'

Mary is a Clinical Nurse specialist for Organ and Tissue Donation for the NNSW LHD. Raising awareness within the community and encouraging family discussions about organ donation is paramount to improving organ donation rates in Australia. HETI has provided an opportunity to explore if barriers exist which prevent rural families from initiating this important conversation, thereby contributing to a body of evidence which did not previously exist.

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