

TEN YEAR REVIEW OF CORNEA DONOR RATES IN THE UK

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Background: In addition to information on solid organ donation and transplantation, the National Transplant Database also contains a complete record of cornea donations and transplants in the UK. This study reviewed cornea donor rates in the UK over the 10 years 1993 to 2002.

Methods: Data relating to cornea donors in the UK from 1 January 1993 to 31 December 2002 were analysed. Number of donors per year and the donor rates per million population (pmp) in each country within the UK were investigated. Donor causes of death and age of donors were summarised separately for “cornea only” and “solid organ and cornea” donors.

Results: Between 1993 and 2001 there was an 18% decline in number of cornea donors reported in the UK, from 3991 donors in 1993 to 3287 donors in 2001. However, it appears that the downward trend in cornea donation may have been arrested, as the figures for 2002 showed a 4% increase to 3431 donors. Data for the first ten months of 2003 suggest that this small increase has been sustained this year.

There were differences in the donor rates pmp for each of the countries in the UK; the donor rates pmp per year over the three-year period 2000-2002 were 32.1 in England, 41.6 in Wales, 14.6 in Scotland and 9.2 in Northern Ireland.

Only a minority of cornea donors also donated a solid organ (15%). The majority of both cornea only donors and solid organ and cornea donors died from natural causes (94% and 89% respectively). 31% of cornea only donors died from a cardiovascular event compared with 4% of solid organ and cornea donors. The majority (79%) of solid organ and cornea donors died from an intracerebral event compared with 13% of cornea only donors. As expected, cornea only donors are generally older than solid organ and cornea donors. In 2002, the mean age of cornea only donors was 64 years (s.d. 18) compared with 49 years (s.d. 15) for solid organ and cornea donors ($p < 0.0001$).

Conclusions: Following an 18% decline in the number of cornea donors over nine years, the number increased by 4% to 3431 in 2002 and this upward trend is being sustained in 2003. Investigation of cornea donor rates pmp shows variation across the countries within the UK.