

Backgrounder

Donation after cardiac death (DCD)

When medically feasible, every family should have the opportunity of considering the option of organ and tissue donation across the province.

Organ donation after cardiac death – or DCD -- is a procedure whereby organs for transplantation are recovered shortly after the pronouncement of death based on cardiorespiratory (cardiac) criteria rather than neurological (brain) criteria. For the last two decades, individuals who have died from cardiac death have been considered potential tissue donors only; they have not been able to donate organs for transplantation.

In December of 2005 the Canadian Council for Donation and Transplantation (CCDT) released a report “Donation after Cardiocirculatory Death” in which Canadian health care professionals supported proceeding with organ donation after cardiocirculatory (cardiac) death. Trillium Gift of Life Network announced in March 2006 a series of initiatives to increase organ and tissue donation in Ontario, DCD was one of those initiatives.

Trillium Gift of Life Network is supporting hospitals that are extending the option of organ donation after cardiac death to patients and their families and will work in cooperation with any hospital that is comfortable carrying out the procedure assisting with intensive care staff and physicians.

Organ donation after cardiac death will make it possible for more individuals and families to have donation wishes fulfilled and will help to address the large gap between those waiting for a transplant and available organs.

For Ontarians, the need to consider new opportunities to increase the availability of organs for transplantation is clear:

- Today in Ontario 1755 patients are on the organ transplant waiting list.
 - 1089 of those patients are men
 - 666 of those patients are women
 - 31 of those patients are children

Patients who meet the criteria for organ donation after cardiac death are critically ill on life support, and there has been an advance directive or decision by the family and treating physician to withdraw life-sustaining therapy. Only after prior and independent

decision by the patient or family to withdraw life support will the option of organ donation after cardiac death be considered.

Several jurisdictions in the United States and Europe have had successful programs for DCD for many years, and more are considering introducing the protocol because of its potential to significantly increase the availability of organs for transplantation, and also to respond to the wishes of patients and families. Other jurisdictions in Canada are also studying the possibility of introducing organ donation after cardiac death.

To support the option of organ donation after cardiac death being offered to patients or their families in Ontario hospitals TGLN has dedicated resources and has developed guidelines to support this protocol. Other hospitals in Ontario are also working with TGLN to prepare their own policies and procedures related to DCD.