

More countries hoping to copy Spain's organ-donation success

Actions by Spanish physicians following the death of a British toddler in Spain may have outraged some UK tabloids, but they also helped highlight the policies that have made Spain the world leader in organ donations.

Megan Jones, 2, died of natural causes related to a viral infection during a family holiday in Spain in April, and her parents agreed to the removal of her liver and kidneys for transplant purposes. When her body was returned to the UK, however, other organs were found to be missing. (Spanish physicians are allowed to remove organs without permission during the postmortem process. They must seek permission to remove organs for transplantation.)

Heavy media coverage of the case drew attention to Spain's phenomenally successful organ donation policies, which

have seen donations increase by 142% since 1989. Not only does Spain have the highest donation rate in Europe, with 34 donors per million people, but it has almost 3 times the UK rate of 13 per million. Other rates range from 20 in France to 12.2 in Germany. In Canada, the donor rate is about 15 per million people.

Spanish officials had considered implementing a policy of presumed consent to boost the number of donors, but instead they created the Organización Nacional de Trasplantes (ONT), a network of transplant coordinators in 139 intensive care units across the country. ONT professionals identify potential organ donors by closely monitoring emergency departments and tactfully discussing the donation process with families of the deceased. (With presumed consent, people are assumed to be willing organ donors

in the event of their death unless they or their families had specifically stated otherwise.) According to the ONT Web site (www.msc.es/ont/ing/home.htm), the number of kidney transplants from cadaver organs rose from 1477 in 1992 to 1998 in 2002. The number of liver transplants rose from 412 to 1003, and heart transplants from 254 to 310.

A survey by Spanish researchers found that of 200 families that declined to have their relatives' organs donated, 78% changed their minds after the process was explained in detail.

Spain's success has attracted attention across the EU. In September, officials from 6 countries met in Frankfurt to discuss transplantation and agreed upon a statement calling for governments to increase donations toward Spanish levels. — *Mary Helen Spooner*, West Sussex, UK

PULSE

More than half of MDs under age 35 now using PDAs

Results from the CMA's 2003 Physician Resource Questionnaire (PRQ) indicate that a third of Canadian physicians are now using a personal digital assistant (PDA) or wireless device such as a Palm Pilot in clinical practice, a 73% increase from the level of 19% recorded in 2001.

In the 2002 PRQ, 28% of doctors reported using the devices. Use is highest among younger doctors, with more than half of those under age 35 (53%) now using a wireless device in clinical practice, compared with 15% of physicians aged 65 and older.

Elsewhere on the electronic front, 17% of Canadian medical practices now have a Web site, the same proportion as in 2002. They are most popular among medical specialists, 25% of whom have launched sites.

After increasing from 41% in 1997 to 89% in 2002, the proportion of physicians who personally use the Internet now appears to have levelled off at 88%. Physicians under age 35 are most likely to make personal use of the medium (96%), while those aged 55–64 and 65+ are least likely (83% and 71%).

A large majority of physicians (90%) have had patients present medical information obtained on the Internet. At least occasionally, two-thirds of them (64%) refer patients to Web sites containing medical information. Those aged 65+ (47%) are least likely to do this. Even physicians who don't use the Internet refer patients to Web sites at least occasionally (33%), while 68% of MDs who use the Internet make these referrals. — *Shelley Martin*, Senior Analyst, CMA Research, Policy and Planning

Proportion of Canadian physicians using a personal digital assistant (PDA) or wireless device in clinical practice, by age group, 2001 & 2003

