

Part 2: Organ Donation and Transplantation Process

Currently in Hong Kong, “brain dead” patients are considered as potential organ donors. Those who died from cardiac arrest can only donate tissues such as cornea and skin - only under special condition will organ donation be considered.

When brain death is likely or has already occurred, the medical staff and organ donation coordinator will conduct initial assessment to the patient. They will also contact the family members of the patient to have further understanding of the situation. If the health condition starts deteriorating or coma starts developing, the hospital will assign two senior doctors to assess the brain functions of the patient.

There is a clear legal definition of brain death. Two independent senior doctors are required to conduct two separate assessments. The doctors need to see if the patient is in deep coma, unable to breath, and solely relies on artificial ventilator. The patient has to have a clear cause for coma. And there should be no possible way for the patient to recover. Before declaring brain death, the doctors also need to confirm that the patient’s brainstem is completely non-responsive and that the patient has lost the ability to breathe. Although natural heartbeat may be observed, the patient relies solely on machines for oxygen and nutrition supply. Once the life supporting measures stop, the patient will die in a short period of time.

When the patient’s condition is irreversible, the medical staff will inform the family. The family members will be given time to digest the cruel reality. The main duties of organ donation coordinators are to take care of the family members and help them deal with the emotional trauma. Coordinators will only mention organ donation at a suitable moment. The final decision made by the family will be fully accepted and respected.

If the consent for organ donation has been given by the patient while alive, patient’s will shall be fulfilled. After the declaration of brain death, the medical staff will provide detailed explanation of organ donation. When the family fully understand the process, they will sign the consent form for organ donation. The staff will then proceed to confirm which organ or tissue will be used for donation. Throughout the process, the staff will make sure that the patient’s organs are still functioning. The patient’s blood pressure, urine output, body water, and body temperature should all be in the normal range. Maintaining body functions is critical to the compatibility of the organs and the success rate of transplantation. The medical team will examine the conditions and functions of different organs. If organs are considered suitable for transplantation, the staff will quickly harvest them in the operation room. The organs will then be transferred to another hospital for transplantation. At the same time, medical staff will select the suitable recipient from Centralised Organ Transplantation Register. The suitable candidates will then go through medical examinations to find out the ideal recipient. The medical staff will pay utmost respect to the donor’s body. After harvesting the organs, the staff will carefully stitch up the wounds. The scar will be covered by clothes to avoid damaging the appearance of the body. After removing the medical instruments and machines, the body will be sent back to the original ward. The family, accompanied by the organ donation coordinator, can take time to say goodbye to the deceased.

Organ Donation Flow Chart

