

Deutsches Ärzteblatt | Year 112 | Volume 6 | 6 February 2015

ORGAN DONATION IN GERMANY AND EUROPE

Regaining trust

The number of organ donations in Germany has stabilised at a 'low level' while, in the EU, some 63 800 people remain on the waiting list

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According to the President of the German Medical Association, Professor Frank Ulrich Montgomery, speaking during the presentation of organ donation figures at the end of January, enhanced monitoring and transparency have led to improved security in transplantation centres and donation hospitals. These reforms were necessary because of the manipulation of waiting lists. "Among other things, we have introduced the 'second pair of eyes' principle in the registration of waiting list patients and set up an independent transplantation medicine contact point for the notification of any anomalies and infringements of transplantation law," explained Montgomery, adding that the powers of the examining and monitoring committee had also been substantially extended.

Table

No of post-mortem organ donors* 2008 to 2014

Region	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
North	195	191	213	193	168	135	153
Northeast	140	146	144	129	113	102	108
East	167	159	155	166	119	106	111
Bavaria	182	196	192	189	155	118	120
Baden- Württemberg	136	127	134	115	119	98	96
Centre	120	139	202	165	141	123	106
North Rhine Westphalia	258	259	256	243	231	194	170
Germany (total)	1 198	1 217	1 296	1 200	1 046	876	864

* excluding living donors; provisional figures for 2014; Source: DSO

Transplant medicine is more secure than ever these days, but, unfortunately, this is not reflected in the number of potential donors. Trust in the system was evidently hit hard by the manipulation scandal. Now, the figures have 'stabilised at a low level', according to the Medical Director of the *Deutsche Stiftung Organtransplantation* (DSO – German Organ Transplant Association), Dr Axel Rahmel. In 2014, 864 people in Germany became organ donors after their death. In 2013, the figure was 876, according to the DSO (see table). In total, 3 169 organs were transplanted in 2014 in Germany via the Eurotransplant organisation, compared with 3 248 in 2013.

Germany is thus languishing in the bottom third of the European transplant league table. "In 2013, there were 10.7 donors per million inhabitants in Germany", reported H el ene Le Borgne, the European Commission's policy officer for organ donation and transplantation at an EU workshop for journalists in Brussels. Overall, she still considers the figures alarming – more than 63 800 patients were waiting for an organ donation in the EU as of 31 December 2013. It is estimated that 4 100 patients died while still on the waiting list in the 28 Member States in 2013. However, the period 2004 to 2013 saw an increase in the number of organ donations (33 %) in the EU, from 26 340 across Europe in 2004 to 31 165 in 2013.

Trust in the Spanish donation system

According to the Commission, Spain, with 35.3 donors per million inhabitants, is top of the donor ranking, followed by Malta (35.0), Belgium (29.2) and Portugal (27.8). Rafael Matesanz, who founded the Spanish national transplant organisation (*Organizaci n Nacional de Transplantes*, ONT) in 1989 and presides over it to this day, told us that "When Spanish people were asked 20 years ago whether they would be prepared to donate their organs, 60 percent were favourable, and this figure has not changed. However, the number of donations and transplantations has multiplied over the same period." He claims that the number of people carrying a donor card or theoretically expressing their support for donation is immaterial. "What counts is the number of actual donors," he says. It is therefore not targeted advertising campaigns that are important, but how organ donation is organised in the hospitals.

He went on to explain that the ONT had trained more than 15 000 intensive care doctors, nurses, paramedics and transplantation officers since 1989 in how to talk to relatives about transplantation and how to identify potential donors.

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