

Rafael Matesanz says the key to securing organ donation is to talk to the families

By Javier Granda Revilla, **the Interactive Doctor**

Representatives of the national transplant organisations of Spain, Sweden, Portugal and Belgium have looked at the successful strategies used to increase donations in a workshop entitled 'Organ donation and transplantation', which took place in Brussels and was organised by the European Commission.

Brussels 16/11/10. Representatives of the national transplant organisations of Spain, Sweden, Portugal and Belgium have looked at the successful strategies used to increase donations in a workshop entitled 'Organ donation and transplantation', which took place last Wednesday in Brussels and was organised by the European Commission.

According to Rafael Matesanz, Director of the ONT, the key to success is for a coordinator, whose skills and prior experience are of great importance, to talk to the families involved. He feels that the publicity campaigns have limited cost-effectiveness and that the focus should be on communication, with a 24-hour phone line manned by staff trained in specific areas and with regular meetings with the media.

He goes on to say that 'communication is a complex issue because it requires dedication and professional support, with trained and coordinated staff. It is necessary to have bespoke action plans with clearly defined objectives, aimed at promoting an active attitude'.

He also feels that the other 26 EU Member States should strive to attain the same donor rates as Spain. This would lead to the transplantation of more than 8 000 organs. The key factors are organisation and ensuring that all countries have similar donor rates, because there is no reason why one country should have a rate of 34.3 per million population while another has 1.5 per million population. It is essential to improve organisation'.

Charlotte Möller from the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare raises the issue of the paradox existing in her country in which 83% of citizens express a desire to donate their organs when they die, with 73% of family members accepting this, - the highest rates in the EU - while the actual donation rate is only 14 per million inhabitants. In Sweden EUR 2.7 million was spent between 2002 and 2005 on advertising to promote organ donation, but this only improved how it is perceived and only produced a slight increase in donor registration.

Focus on health-care professionals

Sweden's new strategy is to place 80% of the focus on health-care professionals and 20% on the citizens. Furthermore, a new internet portal has been created, there has been encouragement to discuss transplants in blogs and on social networks such as Twitter and Facebook and announcements have been placed in a number of publications. There have also been campaigns on European Donation Day, Saint Valentine's Day and at Christmas, and the 2011 World Transplant Games were held in Sweden.

'We decided to draw the attention of the media to the issue by organising local activities, responding to articles, publishing press statements, preparing a document for the media with the contact information of opinion leaders and staff specially trained in communication strategies, training spokespeople, and always being available to talk to journalists'. As a result, dozens of TV and radio interviews were conducted, more than 100 articles were printed in the press, thousands of people accessed social networks and blogs, some 3 500 people registered on the donor register and there were more than 11 000 related hits on Google. This campaign cost a total of EUR 70 000. It is important to view the press as a good way of getting the message out there'.

Specific profiles of transplant coordinators

Maria Joao Agular from the Portuguese Authority for Blood and Transplantation Services (ASST) has reviewed the changes put in place in Portugal in 2007, calling on the participation of doctors from intensive care units, organising regular meetings between scientific societies and creating the post of hospital coordinator of transplants. The law states that only doctors can take on this role and it was suggested that they could combine the post with their everyday duties. The proposed profile also calls for 'recognised expertise, interpersonal relationship skills, a spirited and persistent nature, an ability to appreciate and value the mission and a sound knowledge of the process of organ donation' There are currently 45 coordinators working in 38 hospitals, 62% of whom are doctors from intensive care units. Furthermore, over 200 doctors have been trained in organ procurement and more than 545 health-care professionals have also received specific training in this field.

Finally, Leen Coene of the Belgian Ministry of Health has revised some of the campaigns carried out by Beldonor since 2005 in which the public, authorities, doctors, nurses, schools and examining magistrates took part. The means of communication used were a webpage, posters, pamphlets, radio announcements, posters in railway stations, school supplies, advertising on buses and games handed out in 1 500 schools around the country.