

# Local authorities must work together to promote transplantation

*One of the European Union's tasks is to bring people, national governments and local authorities together with a view to sharing good practices in the area of organ donation and transplantation. The European Commission is encouraging individual countries and regions to develop their own operational systems in this area and local authorities have a great deal of work to do in this regard.*



*Interview of **Tonio Borg**, EU Commissioner for Health, by Magdalena Pokrzycka-Walczak*

■ ■ In October this year, the European Day for Organ Donation and Transplantation was celebrated in Brussels. The main purpose of the event was to draw the attention of EU citizens and representatives of local authorities and NGOs in all EU countries to the importance of organ donation and transplantation in saving the lives of patients. What message would you like to convey from this event to all EU citizens, including Polish local authorities?

– My message is addressed primarily to local authorities and the representatives of private organisations, including NGOs. Let's remember that we can save the lives of many people by promoting transplantation. Your task is to reach out to specialists in transplanting organs from live or deceased donors and provide positive examples of how transplantation saves and transforms people's lives. I realise that not all members of society are in favour of transplantation and are prepared to complete a declaration of consent to the removal of their organs for transplantation after their death. Of course the reality is that some people are vociferously opposed to this. It is nonetheless the EU's task to bring people, national

governments and local authorities together with a view to sharing good practices in the area of organ donation and transplantation. The European Commission would like to encourage the establishment of operational systems in this area, the conclusion of bilateral agreements between neighbouring countries, which helps, in critical situations, to obtain organs for transplantation for patients from neighbouring countries or to send organs to recipients in partner countries with which we have an agreement. There are already regional groups which support and promote organ transplantation within the EU, as well as the non-governmental organisation Eurotransplant, which carries out many activities, including matching organs to specific recipients - seriously ill people awaiting their chance of a new life. The work of Eurotransplant, as well as that of many other groups, including local authorities, enables many lives to be saved and many people to be offered a better quality of life. However, demand remains high. Around sixty thousand people in the EU are waiting for an organ transplant, many of them (about one thousand per day) die. Much still needs to be done in order to reduce this figure.

**■ ■ The Lublin hospital SPSK 4 and the Lublin local authorities want to work more closely together in promoting organ transplantation and donation. At present cooperation is on an informal basis, but this may soon change. Why should European towns and regions actively join forces in promoting transplantation?**

– Cooperation in the area of promoting transplantation is important because local authorities are in a sense beneficiaries or, in other words, recipients of the benefits of transplantation – the chance of a new and better life for those members of local communities suffering from diseases of organs crucial to the proper functioning of the body. It is for this reason that cooperation agreements at local and regional levels, as well as at international level, are so important. Scandinavia, which is home to Scandiatransplant – a European organisation for the exchange of information on organs available for transplantation – sets an excellent example in the area of cross-border cooperation. The more agreements on cross-border cooperation the better, since one never knows where and when someone might need information on organs available for transplantation. One thing we do know is that time is everything when it comes to transplantation. In cases where the best organ for a given patient happens to be available in another country, such cross-border agreements are invaluable. However, cooperation at regional and local levels is also vital. The European Commission therefore promotes and supports regional cooperation with the participation of local authorities – it is precisely the regions which have the greatest potential for development in the area of promoting organ transplantation.

**■ ■ A few weeks ago in Brussels, during the workshop for European journalists on organ donation and transplantation, the Commissioner listened to the testimony of the Italian Raffaella Bruno-Pinto, whose lung transplant gave her a new life. What is special about the testimonies of people who have won the race against time and got a second chance to lead a normal, better-quality life? Why is it worth presenting such experiences during meetings organised by, for instance, local authorities along with regional hospital representatives?**

– We should never forget that the most important goal of the healthcare system is providing optimal care and assistance for patients. Transplantation allows us to reduce pain and offers the chance of a new and better life. The experience of Raffaella Bruno-Pinto, an Italian mother-of-two living in Brussels, who had for several years been suffering from progressive lung failure but in 2010 received new lungs from a deceased donor, demonstrates how invaluable transplantation is. Raffaella made a complete recovery and regained a normal life; she is raising her children and counts her blessings each and every day. Had it not been for the operation three years ago, Raffaella would still be suffering, lying in hospital, or she might even have died by now. Such experiences and testimonies are the quickest and most effective way of striking a chord with listeners and are considerably more persuasive, it would seem, than even the most compellingly written and illustrated leaflet or book. I hope that such living examples of the measurable effects of transplantation will increase in number. It is one of the tasks of local authorities to ensure that this happens.

**■ ■ Thank you for the interview.**