

Project Summaries –

The Influence of Defaults on Organ Donor Registration

Project Description

There have been recent debates around the potential introduction of a new system of ‘presumed consent’ for registering organ donors in the UK as means of increasing the number of registered donors¹. Under such a system the default would be that people would be presumed to be potential donors, unless they chose to opt out. Currently the UK operates a system of informed consent where the default is that people are *not* registered unless they *opt in*. A third alternative is a ‘mandated choice’ system where people are legally required to state whether or not they would like to join the organ donor register, where in effect there is no default.

These debates reflect a wider public policy challenge about how to affect behavioural change amongst citizens in areas where this has been identified as a priority, and there has been much interest in the power of ‘Nudges’². One way of nudging people is by changing the default to encourage more ‘positive’ choices.

This project will test the impact of the contrasting defaults of informed consent and presumed consent as well as mandated choice on organ donor registration levels within a single randomised controlled trial. The study will be conducted as an online experiment with university students who will be randomly allocated to receive a questionnaire reflecting one of these three positions. The main outcome measure will be the number in each group signing up to the Organ Donor Register.

Progress to date

The project is in the set-up phase and discussions with the wider project team and external contacts have taken place to finalise the study design. Contacts have been made with NHS Blood and Transplant to discuss the detail of the interventions to be tested and ethical issues. A literature search and an initial literature review have been conducted.

Next steps

- Obtain ethical approval
- Data collection to occur in late October/ early Nov 2009
- Analysis to be conducted Nov 2009

Outputs

¹ Organ Donation Taskforce, 2008

² Thaler, R.H. and Sunstein, C.R. (2008) *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press;

John, P., Smith, G. and Stoker, G. (forthcoming) ‘Nudge Nudge, Think Think: Two Strategies for Changing Civic Behaviour’, Forthcoming in *The Political Quarterly*.

- A research paper will be presented at the York RCTs conference (Sept 09)
- We aim to report the summary results in Dec 2009 with further analysis and paper writing to take place early in 2010

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