**PRESS RELEASE**

**GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES NEW SYSTEM OF CONSENT FOR ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION**

* Government outlines plans to implement a new system of consent for organ donation to tackle a shortage of donors
* The new system better reflects the views of the vast majority of the population who are in favour of organ donation, and will save hundreds of lives each year.
* The donor register will include an option for individuals to state important religious and cultural beliefs, to ensure they are respected.

Hundreds of lives will be saved each year under plans to change the law to a new system of consent, the Government has announced today.

The proposed new system of consent for organ and tissue donation is expected to come into effect in England in spring 2020 as part of a drive to help those people desperately waiting for a life-saving transplant. The legislation, which was introduced in Parliament last July, is expected to return to the House of Commons in the autumn.

Under the proposals, children under 18, individuals who lack the mental capacity to understand the changes and people who have not lived in England for at least 12 months before their death will be excluded from the plans to ensure the system is fair. There will also be strict safeguards in place and specialist nurses will always discuss donation with families so an individual’s wishes are respected.

**Jackie Doyle-Price, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health and Inequalities said:**

“Organ donation saves lives. We believe that by making these changes, we can save as many as 700 more lives every year.

“But organ donation remains a gift. I want to encourage people who wish to give life in the event of their death to take the time to record their wishes and discuss it with their family.

However, we know this new system alone is not a magic bullet. We need to address myths and misconceptions around donation, and we will only do this by having informed debate and dialogue, which I hope will be fostered by these proposals.”

Research shows that 82% of people in this country support organ donation, but only 37% have recorded their wishes on the NHS Organ Donor Register. The new plan, to be known as Max’s Law, aims to minimise this gap and ensure that this highly personal decision does not fall to grieving families, as is often the case when a patient’s wish to donate is unknown.  Currently, less than half of families give consent for their loved one’s organs to be donated if they are unaware of their wishes.

Three people still die each dayin need of an organ transplant – and currently there are 5,100 people in England on the waiting list. The Government estimates that the new system has the potential to generate 700 extra transplants a year – saving and transforming hundreds of lives. Ministers are calling on as many people as possible to register their decision, whether it’s a yes or no to organ donation.

**Fiona Loud, Policy Director at Kidney Care UK, said:**
“For the 25,000 patients on dialysis in England this means hope and a new future. Patients are dying every day while they wait for a transplant, so we welcome the commitment to change our system so more lives can be transformed. We believe the soft opt-out is the right thing to do, but it is not the only thing to do.

“The change in the law must be accompanied by a comprehensive awareness and education programme and we need to ensure there is capacity across the NHS so that these precious organs are not wasted.”

**Simon Gillespie, Chief Executive of the British Heart Foundation, said:**
“There is a desperate shortage of organ donors in the UK. Introducing an opt-out system in England will better reflect the views of the general public and give hope to those currently waiting for a transplant they so desperately need. This will also ease the agonising pain felt by many families who risk losing a loved one while they wait for an organ.

“It’s still really important for all of us to have conversations with our loved ones about organ donation so our wishes can be met if the worst should happen.”

While the new system shifts the balance of presumption in favour of organ donation, those who do not wish to donate their organs will still be able to record their decision on the NHS Organ Donor Register – either via NHS Blood and Transplant’s website or by calling their helpline. The NHS app, launching at the end of this year, will make it even easier for people to record their decision.

From December 2018, the NHS Organ Donor Register will also include the option for those people registering to state that their faith is important to their organ donation decision. This will allow them to state that their family or faith leaders should be involved in discussions to ensure that religious traditions are respected. As part of the new proposed changes, NHS staff will receive updated training to increase awareness of faith traditions.

The announcement follows a consultation earlier this year, in which the Government sought views from members of the public about organ donation, receiving an unprecedented 17,000 responses.

There will be a 12-month transition period to allow time for discussion with friends and family about organ donation preferences ahead of the new system coming into effect in spring 2020.

-ENDS-

**Notes to editors:**

* Organ donation is only possible in around 1% of deaths, and while great progress has been made already to boost donation rates, the amount of people waiting for a suitable organ far outstrips the number donated organs available.
* Last year in England, there were 1,355 deceased donors and 3,356 transplants but there were still 5,100 people on the transplant waiting list.
* 411 people in the UK died on the transplant waiting list last year.
* Case studies will be available through the British Heart Foundation, Kidney Care UK and the British Transplant Games.

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