



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

Object 3: The donor card



What is it?

The organ donor card indicates that someone has signed up to the organ donation register to donate their organs in the event of their death. These organs are used to replace those of people whose own organs do not work properly.

History

The first organs transplants were described over 2000 years ago. The first recorded transplant involved skin from one person being used to reconstruct the nose of another. The first modern organ transplant was performed in 1954, when a successful kidney transplant took place. The first heart transplant was performed in 1967.

Modern transplants

Around 4000 transplants take place every year in the UK, using organs from around 2000 donors. These operations have saved the lives of hundreds of people and transformed the lives of thousands more. Organs that can be transplanted include the heart, lungs, kidneys, pancreas, ovaries, corneas and heart valves. Although many transplants are performed, there are still hundreds of people who die every year while waiting for a suitable organ. The more people who join the organ donor register, the more lives can be saved.

Pathology

Histocompatibility and immunogenetics (H&I) is the pathology specialty most closely involved in organ transplantation. Scientists working in this specialty are responsible for ensuring that the tissues of the donor and recipient match as closely as possible so that the new organ is not rejected by the recipient's body.

Find out more

To find out more about organ transplantation or to join the organ donor register please visit the [Organ Donation](#) website.