

25 January 2001

HSS(MD3/01)

To: Acute Trusts
Chief Executives

Dear Colleague

RETENTION OF ORGANS FOLLOWING POST MORTEM

I wrote to you on the 15 January 2001 requesting information about organs from babies and children being held within your Trust.

Earlier, in March 2000 you received interim guidance on organ retention here. This document was titled "Organ Retention: Interim Guidance on Postmortem Examination" and I attach a further copy for your information.

In Northern Ireland we need to be sure that Trusts have taken account of this guidance. I would be pleased therefore, if you could send a copy of your current postmortem consent form, together with previous forms that you may have been using, and copies of any guidance that was given to relatives to accompany the form. As practices will have changed over the years I would be pleased if you could provide information about the past practices that your hospital used in relation to consent, and details of when and for what reasons these practices changed.

There is also the wider question of the retention of organs by hospitals in Northern Ireland.

I would be pleased if you could let us know:

- The total number of post mortems carried out since 1970.
- The total number of cases in which whole organs have been retained.

Please divide these into adult, paediatric (<15 years), and neuropathology, as appropriate.

- Whether these organs can be linked back to the individual post mortem.
- The types of organs and the number of each type.

We would also welcome examples of the positive uses that have been made of organs retained at postmortems.

I would further wish you to provide information on the following points: On the material that is retained, who has access to this and for what purposes? Could you please briefly outline the process for getting permission for examination or use of the archived material, by medical staff, researchers or others.

I appreciate that getting this information will not be completely straightforward but I believe we need it urgently in view of the current situation. I would be grateful for a preliminary response by Friday, 2 February 2001 and an indication of how long it will take to complete the inventory.

Thank you for your help.

Yours sincerely

**DR HENRIETTA CAMPBELL
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER**

c.c. Trusts
Medical Directors
Mr B Grzymek