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Creating my personalized organ donation directive

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I do not want to die, but I do want to donate my organs when I am deceased. Of course, most people who want to donate their organs do not die in a way that makes donation a possibility; a fatal head injury is fortunately not too common an occurrence. However, if I do happen to die in a way that makes donation a possibility, the last thing I want is for my family to veto donation, which happens quite frequently.

I am on the organ donor register because I want my organs to be used to save other people's lives and to improve people's quality of life. If my family vetoes donation, three or four people whose lives could have been saved will die, and several others whose lives could

have been improved will continue to suffer. Moreover, my family will have refused to respect my dying wish, which dishonours my memory to some extent. And my motives do not entirely concern myself and those who need organs: my family would very probably come to regret stopping the donation of my organs, and the fact that my death has given other life should give them some solace. (Research has shown that most families change their minds within a few weeks, by which time it is far too late.)

But how can I make sure that my family respects my wish to donate? By making a video for them. This personalized organ donation directive (PODD) will be an audiovisual record of my organ donation intention, which should be much more persuasive than simply having a doctor or nurse tell them I wanted to donate.

Making my PODD is really easy. I sit down in front of my laptop and turn on the webcam. I then record a 1-min video in which I explain why I want to donate, and the strength of my feelings on the matter (see supplementary video and box; note that no PODD website exists yet, but anyone can simply email their PODDs directly to relatives). Once the video is complete, I email it to close family and a few friends, asking them to watch it now and to remember to refer to it if I should die unexpectedly. My PODD can be viewed in the online supplementary material.

David's PODD story

David wants to donate his organs. He has an organ donor card and, as a UK citizen, is on the organ donor register. His family knows of his intention to donate his organs in the event of his death, but he knows that many families change their minds when actually faced with death, and wishes to ensure that his family does not do the same. Therefore, he decides to create a PODD. He goes to the PODD website and enters key details including his name, address, age and national insurance number. He then fills in the online template which allows him to choose which organs to donate—in this case, all of them. He then clicks a button which lets him record a video in which he gently asks his family to respect his organ donation wishes, and also states his reasons for wanting to donate. He also confirms that he wants to be reminded once every year to reconfirm that his organ donor intentions have not changed. Then he enters the email addresses of key family members and friends, signs digitally and then clicks “submit.” His PODD is now created and will be kept in the cloud. All those whose email addresses were entered will receive a link to the PDF and the video. If David dies, anyone clicking the link will be taken to the most recent confirmation of his PODD, or any revised videos that he submits. The entire process took <10 min.

The main advantage of using a PODD rather than relying on the organ donor card or registry is its personal nature. If I die and my distraught family is approached about donation, simply telling them I was on the organ donor register may not be enough to overcome resistance

to permitting donation. Even families who already knew that their deceased loved one was on the register can have extreme difficulty in accepting that they should allow donation. However, if they have watched a video in which I ask them to allow me to donate, they are much more likely to respect my wishes because of the personal nature of the plea. They could even rewatch the video as part of the decision-making process that is the prelude to donation.

The PODD is my own idea, and creating my PODD was a personal choice, but I believe that everyone who wants to donate his or her organs should do the same thing. If all those on the organ donor register created PODDs and sent them to their families, it could really improve donation rates by reducing the family veto. Family members who receive my PODD might thereby be encouraged to sign up to the organ donor register themselves. People could even go further and post their PODDs on Facebook, which would ensure that even more people learn of their intention and could encourage people to join organ registers themselves. (I have not yet done this myself, as it seems a bit morbid, but perhaps I should.)

Ultimately, it would be great if PODDs were created routinely by people who want to donate their organs. In the event of my untimely death, my PODD will make it easier for my family to permit my organs to be donated, and in turn ensure that my death will save lives.

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