

Coordination at the heart of European transplant research

“ This will be one of the first collaboration research projects including the main European transplantation agencies focusing on key aspects of organ procurement and transplantation. ”

While transplantation techniques improve, the supply of organs cannot meet growing demands. Several national and regional research programmes in Europe are investigating possible solutions, but there is little coordination between them. ALLIANCE-O is playing a central role to prevent duplication of effort and disseminate good practices among countries with established transplantation programmes, and those in the process of implementing them. The ALLIANCE-O coordination – which will ultimately take the form of transnational research programmes – will help to harmonise practices and regulations. Consequently, organ donation and circulation will be easier, thereby minimising shortages and reducing incentives for trafficking.

For the 40 000 patients in Western Europe currently waiting for an organ transplant, life is full of tension and apprehension. They know that a successful transplant will transform their lives, yet they wonder whether a suitable organ will ever be found. Mortality rates on transplant waiting lists range from 5-30%, depending on the country and the type of organ required. And these statistics are unlikely to improve in the short term: the demand for organs is rising while donor numbers remain stable. Put simply, organs are getting scarcer.

Making systems compatible

Several countries have launched national research programmes to look into ways to help organ supply meet demand. Projects tend to focus on how to expand the donor pool, improve organ allocation, ensure the safety and quality of transplants, and evaluate and disseminate results.

Yet there is little coordination between the different national research programmes in Member States. One of the main barriers to joint activity is the variation in organisational structures. Some countries have a national transplantation agency, under the control of the Ministry of Health, while others have appointed an independent foundation. Several countries have joined together to create a supranational organisation, such as

Eurotransplant and Scandia Transplant – but many Member States have no central body at all.

Despite their differences, the organ transplant community in Europe recognises the need for greater transnational coordination of research programmes to expand the overall donor pool within the EU, to provide a transparent allocation system and enable the movement of organs and/or patients across borders in order to minimise shortages and avoid the waste of any transplant material.

The European Group for Coordination of Research Programmes on Organ Donation and Transplantation (ALLIANCE-O) has been established to bring together representatives from the organisational bodies of seven Member States, and coordinated by the Etablissement français des Greffes.

Sharing knowledge

ALLIANCE-O is currently conducting a thorough review and comparison of the existing national and regional organ transplantation research programmes in Europe. This benchmarking process will identify best practices among the partners and help to disseminate research results. It will also enable programme managers to allocate resources more efficiently and avoid any duplication of research.

With an accurate picture of ongoing national



Coordination Action ALLIANCE-O

Organ donation and transplant activity per million population (PMP) in Europe, 2003

	Eurotransplant (1)	France	Italy	Spain	Scandia (2) Transplant	UK (3)	ROI (3)
Cadaveric donors	1850	1119	1042	1443	361	710	80
pmp	15.5	18.3	18.5	33.8	15	12.1	21
Cadaveric kidney transplants	3345	1991	1489	1991	654	1297	133
pmp	28.1	32.5	26.4	46.7	27.2	22	35
Living donor kidney transplants	646	136	135	60	271	439	0
pmp	5.4	2.2	2.4	1.4	11.3	7.4	0
Liver transplants	1391	833	867	1037	248	633	32
pmp	11.7	13.6	15.4	24.3	10.3	10.7	8.4
Heart + heart/lung transplants	590	299	317	290	134	164	15
pmp	5	4.9	5.6	6.8	5.6	2.8	3.9
Lung transplants	405	92	65	145	103	135	0
pmp	3.4	1.5	1.2	3.4	4.3	2.3	0

(1) Eurotransplant includes Germany, Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and Slovenia

(2) Scandia Transplant includes Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden

(3) Figures taken from National Transplant Database, March 2004. All others are provisional figures from Organizacion Nacional de Trasplantes (ONT)

Note: definition of a cadaveric solid organ donor varies between countries.

Full title:

European Group for Coordination
of Research Programmes on
Organ Donation and
Transplantation

Research field:

Organ transplantation

Coordinator:

France: Etablissement français des
greffes

Partners:

Germany: Ministry of Health,
Deutsche Stiftung
Organtransplantation
Hungary: Ministry of Health,
Hungarotransplant Psc.
Italy: Istituto Superior di Sanita,
National Transplant Center
Portugal: Ministry of Health,
Organizacão Portuguesa de
Transplantação
Spain: Centro Nacional de
Trasplantes y Medicina
Regenerativa
United Kingdom: Ministry of
Health, United Kingdom Transplant

Further information:

Dr Bernard Loty, Etablissement
français des Greffes
5, rue Lacuée
F-75013 Paris
Fax: 33 1 44 67 59 36
e-mail: bloty001@efg.atrium.rss.fr
website: <http://www.efg.sante.fr>

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36 months

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“ We will be able to promote and to develop the harmonisation
of good practice in this field expecting an impact on organ
shortage and increasing organ donation efficiency. ”

research programmes, ALLIANCE-O will
then encourage coordinated activities.

The thrust of these joint activities will be
research to identify the best possible
framework for efficient organ donation and
transplantation strategies across Europe. In
the enlarged Union it is essential that
harmonised or at least compatible practices
and regulations are set up. This would allow
for the creation of a viable European network
for organ donation and circulation, thereby
minimising shortage, maximising the use of
transplant material, and reducing the
incentives for organ trafficking.

Learning by experience

The work of ALLIANCE-O extends beyond
the participating members. It provides a
valuable resource for countries where organ
transplantation is just beginning. The
consortium will make its research results and
best practice recommendations available to
these countries and thus help them to quickly
and efficiently reach the same level of
competence as exists in those countries

where organ transplantation is already well
established. The group will also coordinate
programmes to improve public awareness
and acceptance of transplantation.

This ERA-NET will prove invaluable for
policy-makers, too. Recent discussions
among Member States have revealed the
need for a better understanding of organ
donor and transplantation practices across
Europe and the possible impact of any
European legislation. By pooling the results
of national research programmes and the
views of participants, ALLIANCE-O will be
able to contribute further to informed debate.

ALLIANCE-O is the first-ever coordination of
donation and transplant research activities
across such a large number of different EU
countries. Through its definition of common
practices and guidelines, it could make a
tremendous impact on waiting periods and
availability – and ultimately on the quality of
life – for a growing number of European
citizens.