

Ex-transplant chief: You don't get mine

A change to the rules on organ donation meets surprising opposition

Sarah-Kate Templeton Health Editor

The government's former transplant chief says he will opt out of donating his organs if the government goes ahead with plans to change the rules in England.

Professor Chris Rudge said he was "horribly opposed" to the proposal that everybody's organs will be automatically considered for donation.

His comments come after Theresa May announced last week a consultation on the current rules in England, which require people to "opt in".

Rudge, who was the national clinical director for transplantation at the Department of Health from 2008 to 2011, said: "I think I would opt out because organ donation should be a present and not for the state to assume that they can take my organs without asking me.

"No one knows better than me the problems of thousands of people waiting for a transplant. Part of me really wants to help them but part of me really objects to the opt-out system.

"I am so horribly opposed to a change in the law and I wouldn't like to be put in that position. Changing the system may take away people's faith and trust in organ donation."

The Roman Catholic Church has also raised fears that the proposals could "endanger the positive ethos of donation". Bishop John Sherrington, who speaks for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, said: "It is important that there is a positive ethos of donation as a free gift with informed consent, which could be endangered by a proposal to move from voluntary donation to presumed consent."

Rudge's wife, Mary, a former nurse, also spoke of her sadness about the proposal, and said she would refuse to give permission for her husband's organs to be donated. "I would say, 'No, you cannot have them.' That, for a family that has been rooted in transplantation for 40 years, is just terrible," she said.

Brian Burnell, 77, a retired engineer from Southampton, has been registered

as an organ donor for more than 20 years and always carries a donor card. As a keen cyclist he is aware that, if he died in an accident, he might be a candidate for organ donation.

Burnell would opt out of organ donation, if presumed consent were introduced. "The state is never going to own my body," he said. "It's mine to do with as I choose. Donating organs is a gift, and an intensely personal one."

But Claire Keegan, whose son, Max, 10, is on the kidney transplant waiting list, believes presumed consent will save more lives. Max has a rare mitochondrial disease that is damaging his kidneys, and has been on dialysis for more than three years.

Keegan, 41, from Wiltshire, said: "These organs are available and nothing is happening with them. The legacy of these individuals could be that their organs could give somebody a life."

Kidney Care UK said it hoped an opt-out system would increase the number of donations.

Sunday Times October 8th 2017