

Opt-out organ donations 'will not solve waiting lists'

NHS chief says system proposed by Prime Minister may yield only 100 extra donors per year

By Henry Bodkin

THERESA MAY'S plans for an "opt-out" organ transplant system will not solve Britain's long waiting lists for donations, the NHS chief responsible for transplants has said. Claire Williment

said there was "no magic formula" to cutting down the tally of three people a day who die while waiting for a donor organ, and predicted that switching to a system of presumed consent may only yield 100 extra donors each year.

The head of transplant development at NHS Blood and Transplant, said boosting donor rates required a combination of measures including more specialist nurses trained to seek families' permission as loved-ones die.

Wales adopted an opt-out organ donation system in 2015 and in October

last year the Prime Minister announced a consultation examining whether England should follow suit. However, a study published in December revealed Wales had not increased its number of donors since the legal switch.

Approximately 600,000 people die in the UK each year but only around one per cent - 5,681 in the year up to March 2017 - are eligible to donate.

Eligibility is mainly determined by whether the death occurred in a hospital equipped to remove organs within 20 minutes after circulation stops. Af-

ter a 63 per cent consent rate and other factors are taken into account, there were just 1,413 deceased donors last year.

This, however, represents a 75 per cent increase in organ donation since 2007, with the waiting list gradually shrinking over the past seven years.

Ms Williment said an opt-out system may help improve rates, but only as part of a wider strategy. "There is no magic formula for organ donation," she said. "It will always be making the most of every single opportunity, raising

awareness, getting people to think about what they want to happen and talk about what they want to happen."

Keith Rigg, consultant transplant surgeon at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, added that it was "unlikely that opt-out legislation would deliver the necessary improvements in organ donation and transplantation rates alone".

Last year in Wales there were just 20 extra deceased organ donors as result of the opt-out system. However, statisticians say it is too early to gauge defini-

tively the extent the system is working.

Opt-out systems have been introduced in Belgium and Austria, where the new legislation was associated with increased donation rates, however in Brazil and Chile similar laws were associated with a drop in donations.

The consultation, which closes on March 6, was criticised for including a "hard opt-out" scenario, where presumed consent cannot be overruled by family members. Last night, however, experts said it was unlikely England would adopt this approach.