

'Brain-dead' patients could be kept alive solely to become organ donors in controversial plans to tackle Britain's organ shortage

- **New borns would become donors under the proposals**

By Nichola Jones

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The British Medical Association (BMA) will unveil a set of contentious proposals today to tackle Britain's chronic organ shortage which leads to the deaths of 1,000 people a year.

Currently, patients diagnosed as brain-dead are kept on an artificial ventilator only long enough for loved ones to say goodbye or for immediate emergency organ donation.

But the BMA is recommending a controversial practice known as 'elective ventilation' where such patients are kept alive as long as is necessary to allow organ donation.

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The procedure is used in Spain and the US, and was trialled at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital in 1988 where it led to a 50 per cent increase in donations. However, it was ruled unlawful by the Department of Health in 1994.

New-born babies would also be allowed to become donors under the proposals. Once a baby is found to be close to death, its heart could be retrieved and used for donation.

Currently, new born babies cannot be donors, and hearts for this age group are imported from outside the UK.

However, the report found some doctors opposed the recommendations on the grounds they could damage public confidence in organ donation and may be 'at the very edge of acceptability' in terms of ethics.

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Another of the BMA's proposals is that a patient who has died of a heart attack could have their heart removed and restarted before it is transplanted to another person.

At the moment, only lungs, liver and kidney are transplanted in these circumstances.

Experts admit this could be an emotive issue for relatives and say greater communication with next of kin would be necessary.

The BMA's head of ethics, Dr Vivienne Nathanson, said: 'When it's well explained, relatives understand that their loved one's heart isn't being jumpstarted and going back to normal or near-normal function in the way that it is with someone with an arrhythmia, the way you see it in Casualty or Holby City.'

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2100264/Brain-dead-patients-kept-alive-solely-organ-donors-controversial-plans-tackle-Britains-organ-shortage.html>