Discussing Organ and Tissue Donation
Within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are hesitant or fearful about registering as an organ and tissue donor. Due to various cultural beliefs, the fears around the process of organ and tissue donation and transplantation can be very confronting for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

It is important for GPs to have an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultural beliefs as this knowledge is instrumental in assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in making decisions about becoming organ and tissue donors.

Cultural awareness in this area can also assist GPs to respond appropriately to any questions or concerns Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients may have regarding organ and tissue donation and help family members faced with difficult decisions to be better prepared, should the situation arise.

Some tips for GPs on better supporting your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients during the decision making process:

• All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients should be treated as individuals, (beliefs can vary greatly)
• Spend time explaining the implications of consent
• Be sensitive to cultural beliefs around death by referring to death as passing away
• Speak slowly and clearly, and remember not to mistake silence as not understanding (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may delay in expressing a firm opinion even though they may hold one)
• Keep technical words to a minimum, or if used, they should be fully explained
• Be familiar with common Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patient questions and on-refer to an Aboriginal health worker where appropriate
• Explain to your patients that a transplant coming from an Aboriginal person is more likely to benefit another Aboriginal person. This is particularly important given the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people currently receiving dialysis, who would benefit from an organ donation.

GPs can also contact the Perth North Medicare Local Aboriginal Health Team for assistance with dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, culturally appropriate resources, or on-referral to an Aboriginal health worker. Phone 9201 0044 or email info@pnml.com.au.

For further information visit www.donatelife.gov.au or contact DonateLife WA on 9222 0222.