



Britain's Prime Minister Gordon Brown leaves his official residence, 10 Downing Street in London, to attend Prime Minister's Questions at the Houses of Parliament, Wednesday Jan. 9, 2008. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)

Brown Wants More Organ Donation in UK

By RAPHAEL G. SATTER – 1 hour ago

LONDON (AP) — Britain's prime minister called Sunday for overhauling the country's organ donation system to make it easier for doctors to remove body parts from deceased patients without prior consent.

Gordon Brown noted in an opinion piece that more than a thousand people die in Britain each year waiting for organ transplants.

Switching to a Spanish-style "opt-out" system — in which consent is presumed — could save thousands of lives, he wrote in The Sunday Telegraph newspaper.

"A system of this kind seems to have the potential to close the aching gap between the potential benefits of transplant surgery and the limits imposed by our current system of consent," Brown said.

Under current British law, organs may be removed only from patients who make their consent known — for example, by carrying an organ donor card — or with the consent of a family member if intent was not specified.

An "opt-out" system would presume consent unless potential donors explicitly registered their disapproval. That would make it easier for doctors to approach families with requests for donations, said Tony Calland, chairman of the British Medical Association's medical ethics committee.

"It changes the awareness of people about organ donation and transplantation in general," he said.

In Spain, the rate of organ donation is now more than 2.5 times higher than in Britain. More than 7,500 people are waiting for organs in Britain.

"In Spain, where they made this change, there has been a considerable increase in the number of organs available," Calland said.

Patients' rights groups were skeptical.

"We don't think a private decision, which is a matter of individual conscience, should be taken by the state," said Katherine Murphy, a spokeswoman for Britain's Patients Association.

"If people want to give the gift of life, that is their right. But it must be something that is a voluntary matter," she said.

UK Transplant, the agency that manages Britain's transplant infrastructure, said it welcomed debate. But it noted that Sweden, which also uses an opt-out system, still has organ donation levels as low as Britain.

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