



# FOCUS ON RESEARCH

## **A RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIAL TO TEST IF A SIMPLE ANTICIPATED REGRET MANIPULATION LEADS TO A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN ORGAN DONOR REGISTRATION**

### **Researchers**

Prof. R. O'Carroll, Prof. E. Ferguson, Prof. P.C. Hayes, & Dr L. Shepherd

### **Aim**

This research tested whether simply asking people to think about and rate the extent to which they anticipated regret for not registering as an organ donor increases organ donor registration.

### **Project Outline/Methodology**

A survey was sent to 14,509 members of the Scottish general public. The questionnaire that people received varied between conditions. In the no-questionnaire control (NQC) arm participants answered some demographic questions. In the questionnaire control (QC) arm people rated these questions plus their feelings about organ donation and intention to register as a donor. In the theory of planned behavior (TPB) arm participants completed the same questions as the QC arm plus items assessing their attitude towards organ donation, how friends and family viewed this action, and how much control they believed that they had over registering as a donor. Finally, in the anticipated regret (AR) arm participants answered the same questions as the TPB arm plus two items measuring how much regret they would feel if they did not register as a donor. Six months later we asked NHS Blood and Transplant to search the organ donor register to see how many of our participants registered after receiving the survey.

### **Key Results**

For those that completed the questionnaire, the percentage of people who registered as an organ donor registration after receiving the questionnaire rates were greater in the NQC arm (43.33%) than the QC (33.87%), TPB (37.33%) and AR arms (36.08%). These results reflect the fact that completing the questionnaire reduced the likelihood of people registering as an organ donor relative to the NQC arm. However, the measured anticipated regret variable did positively predict organ donor registration intentions and behaviour.

### **Conclusions**

This simple anticipated regret intervention did not increase organ donor registration. This may have

been because the participants in the QC, TPB and AR (but not the NQC) arms completed a series of questions assessing their negative feelings towards organ donation. Although these items needed to be included in this research, they may have reduced the effectiveness of the intervention.

### **What does this study add to the field?**

This research demonstrates that anticipated regret strongly predicted organ donor registration intentions and behaviour in a large sample of the Scottish general public. Although the intervention was not effective, the fact that this relationship was found suggests that anticipated emotion interventions may still be important in organ donor registration campaigns.

### **Implications for Practice or Policy**

Our pilot studies suggested that this simple anticipated regret intervention is likely to increase organ donor registration. The present study did not find this, and suggests that further work in this area is needed to test the effectiveness of such interventions.

### **Where to next?**

Further research is needed to determine why this simple anticipated regret intervention did not increase organ donor registration. Moreover, given that anticipated regret predicted registration, it is important to determine effective strategies for incorporating this emotion into organ donation campaigns.

### **Further details from:**

Prof. Ronan O'Carroll,  
Dept of Psychology  
University of Stirling,  
Stirling, FK9 4LA.  
reo1@stir.ac.uk