



Cornea transplantation

- Last year (2007-08) 2,489 people had their sight restored by cornea transplants in the UK.
- Cornea transplants are successful sight-saving operations, with 93% of grafts functioning after one year. By five years, 72% of grafts are still functioning and many will continue for many more years after that.
- The first successful cornea transplant was reported in Olmütz, Moravia, (now the Czech Republic) on 7 December 1905.
- Last year, 2,062 people donated their corneas after their death (including 200 who also donated organs) but there is still a shortage in the UK – more people could benefit from a sight-saving transplant if more corneas were donated.
- More than 45,000 cornea transplants have been recorded on the National Transplant Database since the Corneal Transplant Service began in 1983.
- Both old and young patients benefit from cornea transplants. The youngest person to receive a cornea transplant was just a few days old. The oldest was 104.
- The oldest recorded cornea donor was 103.
- People of all ages can donate corneas and about 65% of cornea-only donors are over 60 years old.
- Corneas from very young donors (under three years) are needed extremely rarely.
- Over half (52%) of all cornea transplant recipients are aged 60-89; nearly a quarter are patients in their 70s; and 3% of recipients are under 19 years old.
- 53% of cornea transplant recipients are male and more men than women donate their corneas - the ratio to women is about 3:2 for cornea-only donors.
- The Corneal Transplant Service (CTS) was launched to help distribute corneas around the country so that all patients who needed a transplant could benefit.
- 90% of transplants use corneas stored in the CTS eye banks in Bristol and Manchester, which use special techniques to store the corneas for up to four weeks. Corneas are sent from other eye banks and hospitals throughout the UK for storage and subsequent distribution to more than 200 cornea transplant units.
- 25% of organ donors also donate corneas.
- Many more people could be cornea donors than organ donors. Unlike solid organs, corneas can be donated up to 24 hours after death. You do not have to die in hospital to donate your corneas but the retrieval service is usually provided by major hospitals.
- In 2007-08 the South West region had the highest cornea donation rate in the UK – about 90 people for each million residents. The UK average was around 34 people per million.

- There are now eight hospitals around the country with full time eye retrieval staff funded by UK Transplant, aiming to maintain or increase supplies of corneas for transplant.
- The NHS Organ Donor Register invites people to specify which organs they'd like to donate. At the end of March 2005, 90% of people joining the register indicated a willingness to donate all organs and tissue. Only 7.2% declined to offer their corneas.

About the cornea

- The cornea is the clear tissue at the front of the eye that lets in light and helps focus it on the retina so that we can see.
- Disease or injury can make the cornea cloudy or distorted in shape, causing loss of vision.
- A cornea transplant replaces diseased corneal tissue with a disc of healthy tissue from a donor.
- The procedure is straightforward and usually takes about an hour to complete.
- There is no upper age limit to cornea donation – many successful transplants have been performed with corneas from donors in their 90s.
- The most common reason for cornea transplantation in younger people is a condition called keratoconus where the cornea becomes misshapen and cone-shaped.
- In older people, age-related or inherited conditions may lead to cloudiness of the cornea.
- Transplants are also needed to remove scarring caused by herpes, the cold sore virus, which can infect the cornea.
- UK Rotarians help to promote cornea donation and encourage people to join the NHS Organ Donor Register. The campaign was launched in Bristol and Bath in 1986.

You can find out more about organ donation and join the NHS Organ Donor Register by calling 0845 60 60 400 or visiting the NHSBT website www.organdonation.nhs.uk

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