A multidisciplinary approach at the emergency department to admit potential organ donors for end-of-life care to the intensive care unit

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Introduction:
The aim of the present study is to improve the recognition of potential organ donors by implementing a multidisciplinary approach for organ donation at the emergency department (ED) [1].

Methods:
In a prospective intervention study, we implemented this approach in six hospitals in the Netherlands. When the decision to withdraw life sustaining treatment was made at the ED in patients with a devastating brain injury without contra indications for organ donation, an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) admission for end-of-life care was considered. Every ICU admission for end-of-life care was evaluated. Interviews were conducted with emergency physicians, neurologists and ICU physicians according to a standardized questionnaire. This interview focused on medical decisions that were made and difficulties arising during hospitalization.

Results:
From 1 January 2016 to November 2017 data were collected on the number of patients admitted to the ED with acute brain injury. In total, 50 potential organ donors were admitted to the ICU for end-of-life care. Donation was either requested in the ED (12%), ICU (78%), neurology department (4%), or donation was not requested (6%). Out of 48 donation requests, 26 families (51%) consented to donation. This led to 21 successful organ transplantations. In four of these 21 patients family consent was obtained to intubate them solely for the purpose of organ donation. The most important points raised during the interviews were: explaining the non-therapeutic ICU admission to the family, the location where donation should be requested (ED/ICU) and utility of ICU resources.

Conclusion:
A close collaboration between the ED, neurology department and ICU is necessary and achievable in order not to miss potential organ donors in patients with acute brain injury with a futile prognosis in the ED.

References: