

EATB / EEBA Statement on Media Stories Published During July 17th to 24th

A number of articles were published this week describing alleged unethical and illegal activities associated with the removal of tissues from the deceased in the Ukraine and the United States. This is completely unrepresentative of the way tissue banking is carried out by the great majority of establishments in Europe, which are non-profit or public sector organisations and are represented by the European Association of Tissue Banks (EATB) and the European Eye Bank Association (EEBA). The EATB and EEBA fully support the Guiding Principles on Transplantation, adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2010, which highlight the need for a robust ethical and regulatory framework for the important field of transplantation. The principles describe conscious consent as the cornerstone of transplantation and stress the need for systems based on voluntary and unpaid donation, the prohibition of the sale or purchase of organs or tissues (though funds may be recovered for the cost of recovery, processing etc.), robust traceability and reporting systems that are open to public scrutiny. Since their respective foundation over 20 years ago, the EATB and EEBA have championed the highest standards of safety and ethics in tissue donation and transplantation in Europe.

Tissue Banks provide a crucial service to tens of thousands of patients in Europe each year, making tissues available for the treatment of a wide range of pathologies. The quality of life of many patients is improved by corneal and heart valve transplantation and bone grafting during orthopaedic surgery and can be saved by skin grafting of severely burned patients. The whole service relies on the solidarity of donors and their families who want to help others after their death. This activity is run by professionals following international standards and, in the case of EU Member States, in compliance with the three European Directives that regulate the field. In Europe, apart from some subsidiaries of for-profit organisations from the United States, this activity is managed almost entirely within public sector or non-profit organisations, by doctors, nurses and biologists. The traditional development of the service has been within the public sector and services have been planned to meet clinical need without any profit-making motive.

The world of tissue donation and transplantation that our members work in was not anywhere to be seen in the articles published this week. This was disappointing for the professionals working in the field and must have been upsetting for the many families who have agreed to the donation of tissues by their deceased relatives in the past. The EATB and EEBA will continue to promote the best possible ethical and quality standards for tissue donation, banking and transplantation in Europe and hopes that European citizens will not confuse the terrible stories told in the papers with the excellent work done by the majority of well managed and professional tissue banking services, through donations made for the benefit of others.



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