



Australasian
Tissue and
Biotherapeutics
Forum

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Operating also as:
Tissue Standing Committee of the
Transplantation Society of Australia
and New Zealand Inc.

c/- Barwon Health Bone Bank
The Geelong Hospital
PO Box 281
Geelong Victoria 3220

16/08/2012

ATBF Statement on Recent Media Stories

A number of articles alleging unethical and illegal activities related to the removal of tissues from deceased people overseas and the commercialisation of tissue were published recently in the Australian press; and 4 Corners screened an edited version of a documentary about this issue on their program on Monday 13th August.

The story depicted in the documentary and in the print media is totally at odds with how tissue donation and tissue banking is conducted in Australia.

Tissue banking in Australia has been regulated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) since the early 1990's. This requires that tissue banks comply with a TGA mandated code of Good Manufacturing Practice and Tissue Specific Standards for donor screening and testing. Our tissue banks undergo rigorous quality system auditing by the TGA to ensure the tissue grafts provided to the Australian public are safe and of the highest quality.

In Australia, families are approached for tissue donation by trained personnel who fully understand that the families of the deceased are in a traumatised state following the unexpected death of a family member. Unfortunately, due to time constraints related to the safety of the retrieved tissue and the regulatory requirement that the tissue retrieval procedures be completed within 24 hours of the death, the approach to the family must occur within a very short timeframe of the death. The Donor Coordinators are trained to approach and support the donor families in a caring and compassionate way, with ongoing support offered as required.

Families are given an explanation in lay terms about which tissues may be donated (e.g. heart valves, bone, tendons, ligaments and skin) and the retrieval procedures, before being asked for consent to donation. Families are also asked that in the event of donated tissue being unsuitable for transplantation, if they would agree for its use for ethically approved research. The family's decision about donation and use for research, is respected without question.

The Australasian Tissue and Biotherapeutics Forum (ATBF) is the peak industry body for tissue banks, with membership comprised of tissue banks and various stakeholder groups such as testing laboratories. The ATBF strongly supports the altruistic nature of donation and upholds the premise of not for profit being the ideal for the ethical management of donated tissue, ensuring respect for the generosity and goodwill of donor families and recognising that donations are made in the spirit of compassion.



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The ATBF supports the Guiding Principles on Transplantation, adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2010. These principles highlight the need for a robust ethical and regulatory framework, the conscious and informed consent of the donor family, the necessity of a system based on voluntary and unpaid donation; and the prohibition of the sale or purchase of organs or tissues.

Australian tissue banks are authorised by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (DOHA) to recover the costs associated with the retrieval and processing of tissues for transplantation as a fee for service. These graft fees are set by DOHA and are recoverable via the medical benefits scheme.

Australian Tissue Banks provide an essential health service to the Australian public, with thousands of patients receiving tissue grafts each year. These grafts improve the quality of life for patients with conditions such as bone cancer and arthritis, and can be life saving for patients with cardiac disorders and severe burns.

Australian tissue banks strive to meet clinical need without a profit-making motive. All tissue banks in Australia exist within the public or not for profit sector; with the exception of one commercial agency, which has a contract with the New South Wales Government.

The ATBF would like to assure the public that they can feel safe receiving a graft from an Australian tissue bank, due to the stringent controls in place ensuring that the grafts our tissue banks produce meet the highest regulatory standards.

In addition, we would like to assure Australian donor families that their gift is treated with the utmost respect and the grafts derived from the donated tissues are made available to those most in need. Tissue banks recognise that without their generous decision at a very difficult time in their lives, these essential tissue grafts would not be available to help others.

ANNE COWIE
Chair, Australasian Tissue and Biotherapeutics Forum