

Human Body: donation & volunteering

Katharine Wright
Assistant Director
Nuffield Council on Bioethics



Scope of the Working Party

- Blood – unpaid ‘altruistic’ donation
- Tissue and organs post-mortem – unpaid ‘altruistic’ donation
- Living organ donors – recovery of direct expenses
- Gametes – recovery of direct expenses or reduced-price treatment
- Participation in ‘first-in-human’ trials – paid volunteers



Supply and demand

- Ongoing pressure to maintain blood stocks
- 7,877 people waiting for organ transplants
- 448 people died during 2008/09 waiting for a suitable organ to become available
- Waiting lists of 1-2 years for donor gametes for infertility treatment
- 'First-in-human trials' – impossible to recruit without payment



Questions for the Working Party

- What degree of 'encouragement' is ethically acceptable?
- What is required for a valid consent?
- What future control can the donor/volunteer reasonably exert?
- What are the policy implications for regulators and intermediaries?
- Should there be a single approach across all forms of donation/volunteering?



Ethical values at stake

- Altruism – a selfless gift
- Solidarity – ‘we’re all in this together’
- Autonomy – ‘it’s my body’
- Utilitarianism – greatest good for the greatest number
- Dignity – does ‘commodification’ of the human body undermine dignity?
- Justice – exploitation and fair remuneration



Encouragement or inducement?

- Current practice based on 'altruism'
- Greater recognition or more tangible incentives?
- Dispensing with post-mortem consent?
- Payment? – regulated or unregulated markets?
- Acceptance that supply *cannot* meet demand?



Consent and control

- Can consent be invalidated by incentives?
- How long does consent last? – when and how can it be withdrawn?
- What degree of control can the donor/volunteer expect to exert?



Policy implications

- How far can regulators and intermediaries go in encouraging people to donate or volunteer? Is there an ethical limit?
- Is there a role of any kind for payment?
- Can the current set of regulatory arrangements be justified, or should they be unified on the basis of a single ethical framework?

