ACCCN Position Statement (2012) on Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation: The roles of critical care nurses and the critical care units and the provision of critical care education

Introduction
The Australian College of Critical Care Nurses Ltd. (ACCCN) is the peak professional nursing association representing critical care nurses throughout Australia. ACCCN supports initiatives to promote and enhance the fundamental role of the critical care nurse within the health professional team for optimal organ and tissue donation and transplantation outcomes in Australia. In 2008, ACCCN had member representation on The Commonwealth Government Cognate Committee on Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation.

As part of the National Reform Agenda, The Australian Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation Authority (The Authority) was established in 2009 to promote a nationally coordinated and consistent approach to organ and tissue donation for transplantation. ACCCN and its Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation Advisory Panel provide comment to The Authority on matters relating to continuing education and organ and tissue donation and transplantation for critical care nurses. ACCCN promotes the Australasian Donor Awareness Program (ADAPT) as the recommended forum in continuing education for critical care nurses.

In establishing its position, ACCCN acknowledges the differing state legislation surrounding the donation of organs and tissues for the purpose of transplantation and the efforts of each of the state based agencies in this process. This Position Statement concurs with guidelines endorsed by the Australasian Transplant Coordinators Association, The Australian and New Zealand Intensive Care Society, and the National Health and Medical Research Council publications on organ and tissue donation.

This Position Statement identifies ACCCN’s professional standpoint regarding the roles of critical care nurses, critical care units, and the provision of critical care education with respect to the process of organ and tissue donation and transplantation. It is informed by evidence from research in critical care nursing, medicine, and allied health, and the expert opinion of Australian nurses in the fields of organ and tissue donation and transplantation and critical care.

Background
The process of organ and tissue donation after death within the critical care environment is significant for all involved. When death is confirmed it marks the end of an episode that has been catastrophic for the person and cause of anguish for family members and a potentially stressful and draining experience for the staff involved. Donor families indicates that nursing staff play an integral role in the process of donation and transplantation.
The transplantation of human organs in Australia has been occurring since the mid 1960s and has provided life saving or life enhancing therapy for many thousands of Australians. Transplant programs in Australia and New Zealand have made positive progress in recent years, with donors per million population increasing from 13.8 in 2010 to 14.9 in 2011. In the same period, transplant recipients increased from 41.7 to 44.3 per million population. When compared to international experiences there remains a significant disparity between the availability of, and need for, solid organs and tissues for transplantation. The complex process of increasing organ and tissue donation must also be balanced with the provision of quality end of life care that focuses on advocacy, dignity and respect for the individual and their family.

Ethical dilemmas can arise in critical care areas where both organ donors and transplant recipients and their families are cared for. These situations require critical care nurses to employ sound ethical principles and knowledge together with sensitivity to those involved.

**Critical Care Nurses**

All critical care nurses should:

1. Be cognisant of, and work within the legislative, jurisdictional and clinical frameworks governing organ and tissue donation for transplantation in Australia.

2. Participate in the process of organ and tissue donation according to the legislative and clinical frameworks, local institutional policies and in collaboration with relevant state based agencies.

3. Participate in regular continuing education in all aspects of donor and recipient management to maintain up to date knowledge and practice.

4. Possess a good level of understanding of the process of donor identification, donor management, and organ and tissue procurement and transplantation within relevant institutions.

5. Provide clinical expertise, emotional support, accurate information and sensitive nursing care to all families who are in a position to consider organ and/or tissue donation due to the patient’s inability to participate actively.

6. Follow ethical principles and support patients and their families to make an informed decision about donation, recognising and supporting their cultural and religious beliefs, including engaging relevant religious and spiritual leaders where required.

7. Provide peer support to professional colleagues through both the provision of accurate information and support throughout the donation or
transplantation process while respecting the privacy of donors and their families.

**Critical Care Units**
All critical care units should:

1. Implement and utilise jurisdictional and unit-based guidelines for critical care nurses regarding donor identification, management and organ and tissue retrieval and donation processes in collaboration with state based agencies.

2. Ensure greater than fifty percent of nursing staff have completed a General ADAPT workshop or similar education and training to ensure currency of knowledge and practice in the area of organ and tissue donation.

3. Support research opportunities and quality improvement strategies locally and at state and national level to improve the organ and tissue donation and transplantation processes.

**Critical Care Education**

1. All critical care nurses should be encouraged to undertake General ADAPT or similar continuing education initiatives to ensure currency of knowledge and practice. These programs should include knowledge of the GIVE clinical triggers and their relevant application; early referral and family support; accurate organ and donor identification; physiological management of donor and recipient; sensitivity and incorporation of ethical, cultural, religious and social issues.

2. Critical care managers and educators should ensure that critical care staff receive regular continuing education, in all aspects of donor and transplantation management.

2. All post graduate critical care nursing courses should include within their program either; a General ADAPT or similar workshop with content as outlined above.

3. Currency in knowledge and application of organ and tissue donation and transplantation, should be a desirable criterion for employment of clinical nurse specialists, nurse educators, and equivalent level positions.

4. New roles and pathways for critical care nurses should be explored by the profession that will further enhance skills, knowledge, and advocacy in the area of organ and tissue donation and transplantation.
References

O&TD&T Advisory Panel
Australian College of Critical Care Nurses Ltd.
www.acccn.com.au
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