Since the Organ Donation Taskforce published its recommendations in 2008, significant progress has been made in the field of donation both in Scotland and the rest of the UK. As a result of the efforts of all those involved in commissioning and delivering the donation strategy, the number of patients waiting to receive life-saving organs has dropped significantly. Importantly, we have seen the evolution of donation into a “usual event” in terms of death within our Intensive Care Units.

We continue to see marginal improvements year on year in the Scottish figures, and the recent news of over 50% of Scottish residents being on the Organ Donor Register is encouraging. There is a glass ceiling to our efforts however, and this can only be passed by a change in legislation.

In our day to day practice, we repeatedly see examples where patients who have expressed their wishes (by registering) to become organ donors at the time of their death, having those wishes overturned by their loved ones when the patient themselves lacks capacity. This issue – family refusal – is a major barrier to improving donation rates in Scotland, and a change in the legislation brought about by the Bill would seek to rectify this. Having moved to make donation at the end of life a usual event, we now need to create a culture within society where donation is expected.

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