

**The BRI Inquiry into paediatric cardiac services in Bristol 1984 – 1995**

Name: Hugh Robert ROSS  
United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust  
Trust Headquarters  
Marlborough Street  
Bristol BS1 3NU

Occupation: Chief Executive of United Bristol Healthcare NHS  
Trust (UBHT)

I have been asked to provide a statement on the current policy of the Trust in relation to the issue of consent to post-mortems and retention of tissue and organs.

1. In February 1999, following our discussions with parents representatives about the retention of hearts and other tissue, I asked the UBHT Director of Nursing Mrs. Lindsey Scott to undertake a full review of the Trust's policies and procedures in relation to the retention of tissue and / or organs and consent to post-mortem.
2. The findings of Mrs. Scott's review were that UBHT policy and practice complied in full with the current legal requirements and that practice was consistent with that in other NHS Trusts. In some instances, UBHT practice was found to be more advanced than in other Trusts. For example, the consent process for hospital post-mortems at Bristol Royal Children's Hospital and St. Michael's hospital is intended to inform parents fully of their

options regarding the retention of organs and tissue, and there are a number of specific information leaflets which are provided to parents. Since mid 1996 the consent form in use at BRHSC and St Michael's has referred to retention of organs and tissue which was, therefore, discussed routinely. That is only now becoming standard practice across the NHS.

3. In summary, the findings were that for a Coroner's post-mortem, where consent is not legally required, medical staff were fully conversant with the criteria for referral of a death to the Coroner and what information they should give to the relatives regarding procedure. For the hospital post-mortems, it was found that all staff were aware of the need for the next-of-kin to sign a consent form and that consent was always obtained. There were found to be two consent forms in use. The one in use at Bristol Royal Children's Hospital and St. Michael's Hospital was considered to be very detailed, (see **Annex 1**). It allows for the parents to specify which examinations they would or would not wish to take place. In relation to the retention of tissues and organs, the opportunity to refuse in certain circumstances is given and individual organs are specified on the form. For the rest of the Trust, a different consent form is in use. This differs from the one already described only in respect of the fact that reference is made to tissues, but not specific organs ( see **Annex 2**). One matter which was raised was the fact that the staff in the BRI complex who obtained consent for post-mortem were not all fully conversant with the procedures in the Pathology Department and might be unable to answer detailed questions raised by relatives.

4. As a result of the review, immediate action was taken to issue all relevant staff with fresh guidance notes on hospital post-mortems, to ensure that they were in a position to answer questions raised by relatives or knew where to obtain the relevant information, (see **Annex 3**). Whilst the Trust meets all legal requirements and, in some instances, has practices at a more advanced level than other Trusts, it was felt that practice could be further improved. There will also be guidance issued from the Royal College of Pathologists in the near future which will need to be addressed. A detailed action plan is now in place to further develop consent and information processes in UBHT, (see **Annex 4**). Action is being taken in the following areas:-

- changing the BRI hospital consent form to the format of the one used at the BRHSC and St. Michael's Hospital
- producing a relatives information leaflet on hospital post-mortems
- contact with the Coroner with a view to developing an information leaflet for coroner's post-mortems
- professional development and training sessions for medical staff who obtain consent
- and the production of a Code of Practice [Pathology] for the Retention of Tissues and Organs.

5. These actions will be complete by the end of this calendar year.

Signed Hugh Ross  
HUGH ROSS

Dated 9/7/99.

H:sst.Hrsuppsta070799