

## **BRI Inquiry**

### **Professor Berry's General Comments on Parents' Statements**

I have been shown and read a large number of statements from parents. I have also met a number of parents in the course of returning their child's heart to them. I have listened to and read what they have to say very carefully. A number of more general themes are repeated in parents' statements, and rather than answer them in each case I would like to add the following additional general comments:

1. It has become clear that there is a great range in what parents understand about the post-mortem examination, and this challenges us to increase the public's general knowledge about what post-mortem examination involves, and the contribution of post-mortem examination to health care. Some parents are naturally upset at what post-mortem examination involves and choose not to receive further information. It is important to respect their right not to know as well as their right to know. Their comments re-emphasize the need for very sensitive and careful explanation to parents at the time of their bereavement whether post-mortem permission is being sought from them, or HM Coroner directs the examination.
2. A number of parents suggest that hearts were retained for research purposes. It was not a question of retaining them for "research". The reason for retention was to enable diagnosis and, following from there, surgeons could learn from each case and continue to have available material retained, as described in my main statement. This is not usually referred to or what is meant by "research".
3. It is suggested more than once that if consent for organ donation for transplantation was refused, or the organs were stated to be too diseased for transplantation, then they should not have been retained or would have been of no use for pathological study.

The Coroner does not have the power to authorise the taking of organs for transplantation, although he may forbid it in cases under his jurisdiction. Separate and

specific consent must be obtained from relatives for this to be done. On the other hand, the Coroner or his pathologist is empowered to retain tissues and organs for diagnosis during the course of a Coroner's post-mortem examination. Diseased organs of no value for transplantation may be particularly useful for diagnosis.

4. The Guidelines for Retention of Tissues at Post-mortem Examination produced by The Royal College of Pathologists have now been circulated for discussion. I am in complete agreement with the principles set out in these guidelines. I hope that there is still a fund of goodwill towards post-mortem examination as a means of benefiting others, and comfort to be drawn from knowing that some good may yet come from a child's death.