The Advantages of a Medical Examiner Implied Consent Corneal Donor Law

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Under a medical examiner corneal donor law the Eye Bank may harvest corneas from medical examiner cases. Permission is implied. The impetus for the law was the relief of blindness. Since the law was implemented maximum numbers of corneas have been obtained. Last year about 750 corneas were obtained in South Florida. Since 1962 about 33,000 have been obtained.

Medical examiner cases are unique in quality and quantity. The medical examiner donor material relies upon autopsy, investigation of medical and social data and acquisition of available medical records. All this data is correlated with Eye Bank personnel who follow strict protocols. The autopsy makes medical examiner cases outstanding in quality compared to donors where only history and laboratory tests are utilized.

Corneal retrieval has a narrow time zone, twelve hours after death. Timely harvesting under the medical examiner protocol assures improved quality.

The basis of the medical examiner donor law is to improve quantity and prevent blindness. Without the implied consent, which does not require tracing next of kin, available corneas would be cut by two thirds.

In summary the medical examiner protocol, which includes autopsy, assures a far greater quality assurance and protection against CJD transmission than those cases which depend upon contacting next of kin for history. Review of cases with corneal transmission of CJD revealed egregious violation of the quality assurance procedures that already exist for medical examiner cases.

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