

German transplant group fights to regain public trust

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The German Organ Transplantation Foundation has announced that it will reorganise itself in an effort to win back the trust of potential organ donors.¹ The announcement comes in the wake of several high profile transplantation scandals that have resulted in a plunge in the number of organ donations.

The number of deceased organ donors was 13% lower in 2012 than in 2011, falling from 1200 to 1046—the lowest number since 2002, the foundation said. At a press conference on 24 April announcing the reorganisation, the foundation noted that the downward trend had accelerated so far this year, with only 230 deceased donors in the first quarter, down 18% from 281 in the first quarter of 2012.

Foundation officials blame the decline primarily on a series of high profile fraud cases at several university hospitals, in which doctors manipulated data to make patients seem sicker than they were so they could be moved up waiting lists.

Scandals last year affected hospitals in Göttingen,² Regensburg, and Munich. Early this year prosecutors launched a criminal investigation of two senior doctors at the University of Leipzig, where between 2010 and 2012 38 liver patients were moved up waiting lists after data were manipulated.

However, the foundation itself has also been blamed as being partly responsible for the drop in donations. In 2011 an anonymous email apparently written by an employee of the non-governmental foundation was sent to numerous politicians and the German health ministry. The email asserted that the

foundation was poorly managed and contributed to lower numbers of organ donations in Germany than in other nations.

Two new managing directors joined the foundation in December to help institute changes, while the long time medical director, Günter Kirste, retired in January.

Rainer Hess, one of the two new directors, spoke at the recent press conference and acknowledged the anonymous criticisms levelled at the foundation's management. He said that the foundation would undergo internal restructuring this year that would include greater cooperation with federal and state health officials and other health and medical bodies. The ultimate goals were to make the organ transplantation system in Germany more transparent and to regain the trust of the German public, he said.

Bernhard Banas, general secretary of the German Transplantation Society, told the *BMJ* that the foundation under the new managers was cooperating more closely with donor hospitals, transplant centres, and institutions. “[The foundation] is performing much better and shows a real interest in improving organ donation rates by hard and professional work,” he said.

- 1 German Organ Transplantation Foundation (DSO). www.dso.de/nbsp/german-organ-transplantation-foundation-dso.html.
- 2 Stafford N. Surgeon is accused of manipulating data to move his patients up organ waiting list. *BMJ* 2012;345:e5039.

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