

Needing a New Year resolution? Put organ donation on your list

Public Health Minister Maureen Watt today issued a call for everyone to consider making joining the Organ Donor Register their new year's resolution for 2016.

This year Ms Watt made a special plea to Scots from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities to consider joining the Register and discuss organ donation with their friends and family.

Statistics show that around 25 per cent of people on the UK transplant waiting list are from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, yet only around five per cent of donors are from these communities.

Due to higher levels of diabetes, heart disease and hypertension within this population group, people from these communities are up to three times more likely to need a transplant than the general population.

But as a transplant is much more likely to be successful if the donor and recipient have the same ethnic origin, the shortage of suitable organs means that people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities wait, on average, twice as long as the general population.

Muhammad Azam, 43, from Edinburgh, received a life-saving liver transplant in December 2014, just days before the New Year.

In 2006, after undergoing a routine medical examination, Muhammad was diagnosed with Hepatitis C.

The father of two said: "I was really surprised when I received the diagnosis. I didn't have any symptoms and felt perfectly normal at the time. Looking back, I was extremely busy as I'd just started running my own shop, so I was probably neglecting my health to a certain extent, but I'd never have guessed anything so serious was wrong."

As time went by, Muhammad's health began to deteriorate, and in 2012 he took a turn for the worse.

He said: "My health rapidly declined and things really went downhill. I was constantly exhausted and was even unable to walk at times because I felt so weak. It was a miserable existence. This was when the doctors told me if I was ever going to recover I'd need a liver transplant."

Muhammad was placed on the waiting list for a new liver in October 2014. After two months, he received the call he'd been waiting for.

"It was late one night that I got the call to say there was a potentially suitable liver donor for me and that I had to go straight to the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. After they ran tests on me overnight, I was told the liver was definitely a suitable match, and my transplant went ahead the next morning.

"I remember having very mixed feelings at this point. I was excited that I was finally going to get my transplant, but I was very aware that for me to get this fantastic news, another family were going through a horrendous time.

"As soon as I came round after the operation I felt noticeably different. I could tell something had changed and I just felt instantly better than I had in months. Since then my recovery has been fantastic. Two days after the transplant I was able to walk around again and within nine days I was allowed to go home to recuperate. I'm now back at work part-time and am looking forward to returning to full-time work in the near future.

“I’d encourage anyone who hasn’t done so already to join the NHS Organ Donor Register. It’s the most generous thing anyone could ever do for another person. Thanks to my donor, I’ve been given a second chance at life. It really is the greatest gift of all.”

Public Health Minister Maureen Watt said:

“Muhammad’s story shows the life-changing impact that a transplant can have on someone.

“This new year I’d call on everyone, from every community, to consider making joining the Organ Donor Register their resolution for 2016.

“It is a reality that we need more donors from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities if we are to be able to help people like Muhammad get a new lease of life.

“Sadly, people from these communities wait too long for a suitable organ and it is vital to encourage more people from minority ethnic backgrounds to join the Organ Donor Register.

“That is why the Scottish Government is working in partnership with Kidney Research UK to deliver the award-winning peer educator programme – which has seen over 400 people from hard to reach communities join the Organ Donor Register.

“We will continue to work hard over the next year to build on this success and address some of the misconceptions surrounding organ donation in these communities.”

Muhammad added:

“I was surprised to find out about the shortage of organ donors from ethnic minority communities in Scotland, because it’s something I’ve always supported. I think there can be misconceptions surrounding organ donation and religion, but actually, all major religions in the UK support it in principle.

“A transplant from someone of the same ethnic group has a much higher chance of success, so it’s vital for people from all ethnic backgrounds to join the NHS Organ Donor Register.”