

# Spain, the world leader in donations and transplants

It breaks a new historic record with 48 donors and 114 transplants per million population, and 27 consecutive years of leadership

01/15/2019

15 January 2019. Spain revalidates its position as a world leader in organ donation and transplantation, beating its own record. Specifically, in 2018, it reached 48 donors per million population, with a total of 2,243 donations that enabled it to perform 5,314 transplants. A figure that raises the rate of transplants to 114 per million population, the highest on the planet.

This is confirmed by the 2018 activity report of the National Transplant Organization (ONT), presented this morning at a press conference by the Minister of Health, Consumer Affairs and Social Welfare, María Luisa Carcedo, accompanied by the Secretary General of Health, Faustino Blanco, and the Director of the ONT, Beatriz Domínguez-Gil.

Spanish leadership, which is based on excellence, continues to grow. In the last five years alone, the ONT, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary, has increased its donation rate by 37%, the largest increase in its history, from 35.1 to 48 donors per million population. These figures mean 6 new donors and 14.6 transplants every day.

More specifically, the ONT has recorded historical highs in renal 3,310 and pulmonary 369 transplants, in addition to 1,230 hepatic, 321 cardiac, 82 pancreas and 6 intestine transplants. The ONT also highlights the implementation of a plan to improve infant transplantation - in 2018, 4 interventions of this type were carried out; the first international kidney transplant from southern Europe together with Italy; and the leadership of Spain before the United Nations in the fight against organ trafficking.

<https://mosaicscience.com/story/spain-uk-organ-donation-transplants-liver-kidney-heart-lungs-surgery-nhs/>

The person who is ultimately responsible for all the logistical planning and organisation here is Beatriz Domínguez-Gil, the ONT's director. She has held the post since May 2017, when her long-standing predecessor, Rafael Matesanz, retired. He ran the ONT from 1989 to 2001 and 2004 to 2017.

Domínguez-Gil says that Matesanz conceived the Spanish model, and describes him as a "visionary". The model involves hospitals having trained coordination teams who manage potential donors in intensive care units (ICUs) and a central authority that decides where donor organs end up.

Although opt-out was actually introduced in Spain in 1979, it was only with the introduction of the ONT a decade later that donation rates really began to improve. After just a few years of the ONT operating, Spain became the country with the most organ donors per million population.

Nevertheless, countries without opt-out systems continue to focus on changing the law as a key way to increase donations.

In [comments to the Toronto Star](#) in 2013, **Matesanz made an interesting point: taking the time to introduce the possibility of organ donation to a patient's relatives makes it much more likely that they will consent in the event of death. That's why those ICU coordination teams are so important. They are PR for organ donation – at the point where the case really needs to be made. Importantly, the lead coordinators are always doctors, though they may have nurses in their team. This is so that any clinical issues around the viability of organs or the health of the patient are properly assessed.**

Spain has ploughed money into this effort, training more than 16,000 medical professionals in procedures regarding organ donation and transplantation since the ONT was founded. And since 1992, Spain's position as world leader has remained uninterrupted. "It has become something that makes the Spanish society feel proud," says Domínguez-Gil.

As well as saving lives, transplants save money, she says. For kidney patients, for example, the cost of long-term dialysis exceeds that of transplant surgery. Five years of haemodialysis, which uses an artificial kidney outside the body to filter blood, costs over €160,000 more per patient than a transplant. By performing thousands of kidney transplants a year and keeping patients off dialysis, the healthcare system saves over twice what it spends on all solid organ transplants.

One significant barrier to keeping donation rates high is an otherwise positive development in modern societies: a falling of mortality from causes that permit transplantation. One reason is that road traffic deaths are becoming less common. As in many Western countries that have adopted strict seatbelt laws, the number of people who die in road traffic accidents in Spain has plummeted in recent years. Deaths among young road users have fallen more than for other age groups.

Spain, like other countries, has therefore had to be increasingly creative in identifying alternative sources of donor organs. For instance, it is becoming increasingly common to find donors in their 70s, 80s and, in a few cases, even their 90s. The oldest deceased donor recorded in 2017 in Spain was 91, a liver donor.

## TASKS

1.- Read the text and look for the meaning of the new vocabulary

2.- Answer the following questions:

- Who is Rafael Matesanz?
- What was the record carried out in 2018?
- What is the *Spanish model* on Organs donation?

3.- Visit the link and keep up with ONT, National-Transplan-Organizations

Visit the link: <https://mosaicscience.com/story/spain-uk-organ-donation-transplants-liver-kidney-heart-lungs-surgery-nhs/> to go in depth about organs donation stories.