

Despite corona: Tissue donation stable in Germany

Hanover/Germany, 01/13/2021 – **3,029 donors or relatives consented to donate tissues such as cornea, heart valves, blood vessels and amnion (placenta) last year. Despite a decrease in donations during the first corona lockdown in Germany in spring, the German Society for Tissue Transplantation (DGFG) was able to maintain the high level of donations from the previous year. In total, the DGFG provided 6,268 tissue transplants to patients throughout Germany. Tissue donations promise confidence for a self-determined life. Corneal transplants restore sight and save patients from blindness.**

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“In these challenging times, we owe it primarily to the prudent donors and their relatives that we were able to maintain the high donation level in 2020 compared to the previous year, despite the significant drop in donations in April and May”, states Martin Börgel, Managing Director of the non-profit DGFG.

41,327 notifications of potential donors were checked by the tissue donation coordinators of the DGFG for medical contraindications and other reasons for exclusion. 7,441 interviews with relatives (or living donors) resulted from this, in which the coordinators provided information about the possibility of tissue donation. While most countries in the EU have established an opt-out system in organ and tissue donation, Germany applies the extended consent solution (opt-in). Thus, tissue donation was approved in 3,029 cases (2019: 3,007). The consent rate for tissue donation was around 41 percent. From the donations that were carried out, 5,938 tissue preparations could be obtained for the care of patients throughout Germany.

Corneal transplantation: Gentle, lamellar surgical procedure increasingly in demand

In 2020, the DGFG was able to provide 3,962 patients with a corneal transplant to restore or maintain their vision. On average, around 7,000 corneal transplants are processed in Germany each year. *“More than every second cornea is provided by the DGFG. We can now fulfil most requests for corneal transplants within a few weeks”,* says Börgel.

53 per cent of transplants are requested for DMEK (Descemet Membrane Endothelial Keratoplasty) surgery. In this gentle surgical procedure, doctors replace only a thin layer of the cornea – a so-called lamella – so that the patient’s vision recovers much faster and the risk of infection remains minimal. Specially developed for this transplantation procedure, the DGFG provided 487 pre-prepared corneal lamella (LaMEK) (2019: 381).

A gift to life: Placenta donation helps people to receive therapy without trauma

In 2020, the DGFG was able to realise 20 placenta donations in the context of planned caesarean births. The so-called amniotic membrane, the inner skin of the sac surrounding the fetus, is extracted from the placenta. Doctors can use the wafer-thin membrane in gynecological surgery, oral and maxillofacial surgery and as a temporary skin substitute for thermal injuries and wound healing disorders.

In Germany, the amniotic membrane is so far mainly used in ophthalmology for the treatment of severely diseased eye surfaces. A therapy without additional trauma by sewing in the amniotic membrane is made available by the DGFG’s AmnioClip-plus (AC+), which has been approved since the

The annual data are preliminary (as of 12/28/2020).

end of 2019. The amniotic membrane, which is clamped into a ring, is placed on the affected eye – similar to a contact lens. In 2020, 98 AC+ applications benefited patients to preserve their eyes and vision. A total of 1,942 “wound plasters” from amniotic membrane donations were provided (2019: 1,880).

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Network structure ensures patient care even in the crisis

The fact that patient care could be guaranteed even in the difficult months of March to May despite the Corona pandemic is due to the nationwide network organisation of DGFG and partners. The cooperating forces are tissue donation coordinators, more than 100 donor hospitals and 13 tissue banks: numerous university hospitals, municipal and denominational hospitals, but also large hospital groups report potential tissue donors to the DGFG. Among others, the Robert Bosch Hospital in Stuttgart and the Friedrich Ebert Hospital in Neumünster joined the DGFG network in 2020.

About the German Society for Tissue Transplantation (DGFG)

The DGFG has been promoting tissue donation and transplantation in Germany since 1997. Based on the German Tissue Act of 2007, all activities and processes of tissue donation are regulated by law. All tissue preparations are subject to a ban on trade. The DGFG arranges its transplants via a central procurement office with a nationwide waiting list. Every medical institution in Germany can obtain tissue from the DGFG. As an independent, non-profit organization, the DGFG is supported exclusively by public health care institutions. The DGFG is unique in Germany in its organizational structure, the voluntary nature of its support by the network partners and its independence from private or commercial interests. Find out more about DGFG www.gewebenetzwerk.de