

**ADDRESS BY**

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**MINISTRY OF HEALTH**

**REPSOL MEDIA CONFERENCE**

**“GIVE LIFE. BECOME AN ORGAN DONOR. TALK TO YOUR FAMILY”**

**HYATT REGENCY, WRIGHTSON RD, POS**

**FRIDAY JULY 6<sup>TH</sup> 2012 @ 10:00AM**

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**SALUTATIONS**

- ❖ Chairperson Ms Heidi Diquez, External Relations and Communications Manager, REPSOL
- ❖ His Excellency, Ambassador Joaquin De Aristegui, Embassy of the Kingdom of Spain
- ❖ Dr Bernadette Theodore-Gandi, PAHO/WHO Country Representative
- ❖ Mr Luis Polo, Director REPSOL Business Unit
- ❖ Dr Lesley Roberts, Director National Organ Transplant Unit
- ❖ Dr Maria Paula, Donation Transplantation Institute
- ❖ Dr Bridgit Elcock, Port of Spain General Hospital?
- ❖ Senior officials and staff of REPSOL, the Ministry of Health, the Regional Health Authorities and the Donation Transplantation Institute
- ❖ Members of the medical fraternity
- ❖ Specially invited guests and members of the media

Good morning.

It is my pleasure to address you this morning on behalf of the Minister of Health, the Honourable Dr Fuad Khan, at this media conference themed “Give Life. Become An Organ Donor. Talk To Your Family”. I wish to warmly welcome the team from the Donation and Transplantation Institute. I hope you have been enjoying the warm hospitality of our citizens and taking the time out to see a bit of our beautiful twin-island republic. I wish to thank the REPSOL Foundation and the Donation and Transplantation

Institute for their ongoing contribution toward the development of a deceased organ donor network in Trinidad and Tobago via their sponsorship and training, respectively.

I also wish to take this opportunity to thank the Ministry of Health's National Organ Transplant Unit (NOTU) for the work they have been doing to facilitate and promote organ transplantation in Trinidad and Tobago. The National Organ Transplant Unit has shown that they possess the expertise to perform organ transplantation, and we look forward to a significant increase in the number of transplants in the future.

I am pleased to share that in addition to kidney transplants, corneal transplantation is available within the public health sector. In 2006, corneal transplantation commenced at the Port of Spain General Hospital with donor corneas provided by an Eye Bank in the United States. Corneal transplantation was launched in January 2011 at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex (EWMSC), and came about as the result of collaboration between the North Central Regional Health Authority (NCRHA), Ophthalmological Society of Trinidad and Tobago (OSTT), the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the National Organ Transplant Unit (NOTU).

However organ availability remains a limiting factor. For instance, at the Port of Spain General Hospital, there are twenty-eight (28) patients on the waiting list for corneal transplantation. The need for our own Eye Banking facility, and education and encouragement of our population to be donors is therefore clear to preserve sight.

To do organ transplantation, we need a steady supply of donated organs. But at the moment, organ supply is always less than demand. Currently we are functioning with only have living donors, who can only help 1 person at a time. What we need also are deceased donors. Every deceased donor can possibly help several persons at once - for instance, a living donor can only give 1 kidney. Whereas, 1 deceased donor can give 2 kidneys to help 2 persons. Giving the gift of life after death is indeed a remarkable act of kindness.

The next step in the development of a comprehensive National Transplant Program is to develop a sustainable supply of organs for transplantation. There is the need to develop a robust deceased donor program to compliment living organ donation. The success of such a program requires the support of the entire population, as citizens have to be prepared to become organ donors.

The reality is that our hospitals can also provide many potential organ donors to the hundreds in desperate need of this operation. We are enabling health care professionals to become what we may term "organ donor champions". These are health care workers who work in Intensive Care Units, Operating Theatres and Accident and Emergency Departments, and who will be trained to understand the process of organ donation and transplantation, so that they can better facilitate and encourage organ donation from the families of deceased persons at the hospitals. Making our hospitals transplant friendly is just one of many steps in our efforts to increase the organ donor pool so that the chances of patients in need of transplant would be that much closer to getting a new lease on life.

It is in light of this, in October 2011, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has partnered with the Donation and Transplantation Institute (D.T.I.), a non-profit organization that was founded in Barcelona, to initiate the project 'Organ Donation and Transplant Network for Trinidad and Tobago'.

The objectives of this project are:

- ❖ Improve and develop the organ donation and transplantation process, thereby increasing the number of organ donations that occur, particularly for deceased donation;
- ❖ Improve on the professional skills of physicians and transplant coordinators in the public health system and the National Organ Transplant Unit via training and education
- ❖ Familiarize Health professionals about donation and transplantation so that they contribute to the development of the transplant network

I understand that to date three (3) local doctors have already participated in transplant coordination training and internship in Spain, and there are ongoing visits from expert transplant surgeons from Spain to meet with our local doctors, as part of this continuous transfer of knowledge and skills.

I wish to take this opportunity to ask our citizens to give life. Become an organ donor. Talk to your family members today about becoming an organ donor. A pledge by a person to donate his or her organs is indeed a great thing. Sign up today to become an organ donor by calling our 800-DONOR Line, or go online at the Ministry's website, [www.health.gov.tt](http://www.health.gov.tt), and become a registered organ donor.

In addition, the Ministry has been in discussions with the Licensing Division of the Ministry of Transport, so that in the near future, citizens can indicate they are willing to be a deceased organ donor on the proposed new Drivers License.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Ministry of Health remains committed to making high quality health care accessible to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I again warmly thank the REPSOL Foundation and the Donation and Transplantation Institute for partnering with the Ministry of Health in this initiative. We remain committed to developing a deceased donor network in Trinidad and Tobago, to assist the large number of persons waiting for transplants and ensuring that these persons enjoy their right to life.

Thank you.