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17th World Congress of Neurology - London 17th-22nd June 2001

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Braindeath - European proposition for global consideration

The concept of "brain death" has tremendous ethical, legal, social, religious and cultural implications for society; its impact on the person concerned can be final and it affects deeply the next of kin. In many states "brain death" is a legal precondition for the termination of life supports and cadaveric organ donation. However, the legal definitions of "death" vary from nation to nation. Since neurologists play a crucial role in the clinical determination of "brain death", we suggest defining minimal standard requirements to be observed by neurologists involved in brain death determinations. A preliminary proposal has been presented at the "3rd International Symposium on Coma and Death" (Havana/Cuba, Feb 2000).

The European proposition for a consensus paper on brain death demands the following:1. Signs and symptoms of brain death (coma, breakdown of all motor functions including brain stem reflexes and sensory input, demonstrable apnoea, hypothermia, spinal cord reflexes) isoelectric EEG recorded over a two hour period together with transcranial Doppler sonography (TCD). 2. Waiting period of six hours, which may be longer in certain cases (e.g. children) and shorter in others (e.g. brain stem rupture, gun shot etc.). 3. Clarified aetiology. 4. Monitoring and documentation of the clinical course. 5. Independent team of specialists: neurologist for clinical symptoms and signs, anaesthesiologist for intensive care, supplemented by EEG and TCD specialists. Members of the transplantation team are strictly excluded. No member of the committee responsible for brain death determination must take part in any further medical acts concerning the deceased.

We suggest the present proposition as a starting point for discussion with the aim of producing an internationally acceptable minimal standard for neurologists. These recommendations should be compatible with the different legal, religious and cultural demands in various regions worldwide.

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