

Farewell to a tireless campaigner

Chris Burns-Cox Died, 29th June 2018, age 80



With the death of Chris Burns-Cox, we have lost a selfless, energetic, humane campaigner, who dedicated his life to improving the lot of his fellow man.

Chris, a retired consultant physician from Gloucestershire, was a force of nature. Once he got the bit between his teeth, there was no stopping him. In 2010, after he had donated a kidney to a stranger, he took up the cause of altruistic kidney donation. He was sure more people would donate a kidney if they knew they could. He had a wonderfully optimistic view of human nature. And such were his persuasive powers that everyone he approached just fell into line.

I met him because I had written an article in the British Medical Journal about donating a kidney to a friend. He wrote to me in August 2010 suggesting that we meet to publicise the cause and so we got together at BMA House in the autumn of that year.

We put together a steering group and, between us all, we thought up a name, wrote a constitution, got charity status and set up a website. Then we had a big launch in November 2011, which generated lots of wonderful publicity, which has never stopped.

After the charity got going, altruistic donations rose from 15 in 2009/10 to 118 in 2013/14. Donations fell back slightly after that and now stand at 88 a year. But today, some of the donors set off a chain of donations because of the "matching scheme",



so the number of beneficiaries is likely to be considerably higher than that.

The website is always busy, supplying information and encouragement to anyone interested in donating. Last year it had 153,000 users, with more than 400 people hitting the site every day. Moreover NHS Blood and Transplant has now incorporated altruistic, or non-directed donation as it is sometimes called, into its national strategy.

None of this would have happened without Chris. He was tireless. When some of us felt like flagging, he would always renew our enthusiasm. And when in November 2012, I stepped down as chairperson of the organisation, he stepped in to take my place, doing the

job with kindness, patience and tact for four years.

He was also wonderfully eccentric. When my husband, Fred Kavalier, was saying goodbye to him one day, he added the common injunction to "take care." That provoked indignation in Chris. He told Fred he hated that expression. He said: "I don't want to take care. I want to live dangerously, and live to the full." And that is what he did.

Farewell Chris, we will miss you.

*Annabel Ferriman,
Co-Founder, Give a Kidney - one's enough*

I met Chris very soon after I started with NHSBT in August 2010. Within my first week I was presented with a letter that Chris had written following his own donation, to Lynda Hamlyn - then Chief Executive of NHSBT - asking what could be done to increase awareness about altruistic donation. The news of Chris's death prompted me to look for his letter, which I was delighted to find! - The style is inimitably 'Chris' and deserves its place in the Charity's history. As I re-read it, it made me smile and I hope it does the same for you.

Chris is a significant and very individual part of the legacy of 'Give a Kidney' which has, in a very short time, become so well established within the organ donation and transplant community and has played a huge role in making non-directed donation part of 'business as usual'. He will be missed.

*Lisa Burnapp
Lead Nurse - Living Donation
NHS Blood and Transplant*

To the Chief Executive of NHS blood and transplant
Oak House, Reeds Crescent,
Watford, Herts WD24 4QN
August 2 2010



Dear Lynda Hamlyn,

Altruistic living kidney donors.

I believe the number in 2009 was only 15 and so far this year only 16.

I am sure there are many people who would donate if they knew more about the procedure.

I would suggest that those who have donated altruistically might meet together to 'perform something' to enhance publicity.

Dr. Annabel Ferriman and I have both donated and are trying to think of an idea for this.

Please would you tell me whether you would be prepared to mail to all altruistic donors if we can devise a suitable occasion for publicity?

We would hope that the invitation to take part would come supported by yourself!

Finally have you or any of your staff an idea of what sort of event might be best?

Thank you so much

Yours sincerely

Chris
Dr. C.J. Burns-Cox MD FRCP

Dr Chris Burns-Cox qualified in 1960 with a view to becoming an entirely NHS consultant general physician. His aim had always been to help practically where needed. He worked at Frenchay Hospital, Bristol, between 1971 and 1999 - where he started district policy guidelines. Other appointments included: MO Colony of British North Borneo, Lecturer University of Malaya, Bangladesh (Consultant WHO Smallpox eradication), Liaison officer UK NHS-St Helena, Teaching and examining Medical Students in Occupied Palestine 1990-2012, Lecturer University Kumasi and in Tamale Ghana, Locum CMO Anguilla.

"I'm not the first person to give a kidney to a stranger but it seemed to me that we needed to tell the public that this is a possibility, that it's available and kidneys are very badly needed. I had been a doctor for 50 years and was aware how enormously fortunate I had been in my own good health. And I just came to the conclusion that I didn't need two kidneys."

"Humans only need one kidney to live a perfectly normal life, and donors can be pretty well any age over 18, so there are millions of people walking around with the potential to save a life."

"Once I told them [of my donation], a deadly hush descended - it was very odd. ... Then as soon as I told one friend, a fellow doctor I had worked with in Gaza, and a very marvellous character, he went and did it straight away. It's so obviously the most useful thing you can do."

"Our job now is not to persuade people to do it but to put the facts of the situation out there and if they then want to help a stranger they'll know where to come for information."

"I am confident that when the public realises that donation is no big deal for the donor - but a really enormous one for the recipient - many will join Give a Kidney - one's enough. If we campaign effectively enough for this, the days of suffering and dying on a kidney transplant waiting list will be over. Humans will again show that we can not only torture, exploit and kill but, amazingly, save each other."

"I've always known there is a lot of altruism about if only it could be harnessed. I'm also very keen on the idea of counteracting the attitude that wealth is everything. This is a healthy thing for society."

"It seemed to me that you could convert somebody's life from major misery and early death to normal again. It seemed like the most useful thing I could do. These were good reasons for looking around for what else I could do to be of use and ease a little suffering. Giving a kidney to a stranger anonymously had been discussed in the newspapers, so I rang the local transplant unit to find out more."

Letter from Dr Chris Burns-Cox appearing in the 14th April 2014 edition of the Independent: ▼

What with the behaviour of MPs, the police, the military and the immigration officers, one wonders what the UK authorities get right. Now they push disgrace to a new level, and without shame.

You report on the sad failure of UK authorities to permit the Jamaican sister of UK citizen Oliver Cameron to enter the UK to give him an urgently needed kidney.

To fail to record the correct details of donor and donation (liver instead of kidney) is bad enough but to refuse to allow this brave act of life-saving love is an act of cruelty and a complete disgrace to us all. I pray the Home Secretary will ensure she apologises and enables the donation to take place straight away.

Lest any believe this will be at net cost to the NHS, the expense to the NHS of keeping a patient on dialysis is around £30,000 a year, but only £5,000 a year after successful transplant.