

Wednesday, 19 February 2003

QUESTIONS ANSWERED ON RETAINED ORGANS

Victorians wanting to know more about organs and bone samples taken from a family member at an autopsy performed some time ago can now ring a dedicated information service, Health Minister Bronwyn Pike announced today.

“In the past there was a reluctance to tell family members about the processes of an autopsy for fear of increasing their distress at an already very difficult time,” Ms Pike said.

“This means that sometimes human tissue such as organs were kept for medical or scientific purposes without the family’s knowledge.

“However, it is now understood that families have a right to information and need to determine for themselves what information about past autopsies they would like to know.

Two national reports have addressed this issue and their recommendations are being implemented. An audit has also been conducted in Victoria of retained organs and bone samples taken at autopsy.

A national information pamphlet and a poster have been prepared to alert families to telephone information lines aimed at allowing them to make inquiries when and if they are ready.

From Monday the Victorian information line can be contacted by calling **1300 657050**.

Ms Pike said this approach was adopted so that individuals could choose if and when they obtained information about past autopsies. Next of kin will not be directly contacted.

“Families will be able to seek material through the information line if they are concerned that a family member may have been involved,” Ms Pike said.

Information and pamphlets have been provided to doctors surgeries, Divisions of General Practice, Community Health Centres, Maternal and Child Health coordinators, public and private hospitals and grief support organisations such as SIDS and SANDS.

“The information available will depend on what records can be accessed and usually can only be released to the senior available next of kin of the person who died,” Ms Pike said.

Further information, including translated versions of the pamphlet, is also available at <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/phd/postmortem/>