

## The Certification of Transplant Coordinators in Europe

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### ABSTRACT

The appropriate clinical management of the integrated process of Donation and Transplantation implies the participation of the Transplant Coordinator. The aim of this article is to present the process of Certification of Transplant Coordinators in Europe since 2001, in accordance with the Council of Europe Recommendations and the evolving model implemented in 2008 under the auspices of the UEMS, reporting the longest running European standardized assessment of Transplant Coordination skills and knowledge. It includes the rationale for development of a certification process, how the examinations were developed and updated, eligibility to take the examination, and relationship with standards of practice for Transplant Coordinators. A total of 455 healthcare professionals were certified in two phases: 1<sup>st</sup> ETCO certification since 2001 to 2007 (390) and 2<sup>nd</sup> ETCO/UEMS certification from 2008 to 2011 (65).

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**C**ERTIFICATION is a compliance with a set of standards generally defined by non-governmental organizations. Certification is applied for by individuals on a voluntary basis and represents a professional status when achieved.

Transplant Coordinators (TC(s)) are health care workers responsible for organ and tissue procurement, sharing and distribution in hospitals or regional or national organ exchange organizations. Their role has developed steadily throughout Europe but practice, structure and professional background vary considerably from country to country.

Developing a voluntary method of Certification improves the quality of the service and contributes to raising professional standards [1]. A consistent level of quality is important to maximize the procurement, sharing and distribution process and to thus raise organ and tissue retrieval and transplant rates.

The transplantation community has always had high expectations of TC procurement results as they work is considered fundamental to solve organ shortage. In exchange, these professionals should demand recognition of their job in the donation/transplant process in all healthcare systems. For this objective to be achieved, clearly defined roles and certified skills and training are necessary.

### KEY TASKS OF THE TRANSPLANT COORDINATOR

TC(s) should implement strategies to evaluate the donor pool, diagnose hospital performance, start a proactive donor detection programme, raise the effective/potential donor

index and improve objective figures of organ donation (number of donors, % of MOD, number of transplants per donor) at their work places [2].

Involvement in hospital development activities and promotion of other projects (NHBD, tissue donation, preservation, hospital and public awareness) are expected; lectures and publications in the field should be valued as they reflect commitment and field expertise.

Procurement Coordinators are responsible for identifying potential organ donors and managing the whole donation process in order to maximize the rate of organ (and also tissue) donation from deceased donors. Procedures central to the process of organ donation and procurement include: donor management, determination of death, driving the process of consent/authorization, organ and tissue retrieval, preparation, preservation, packaging and final transport to the transplant hospital and tissue banks, and finally the organization of a quality control system to ensure the safety, quality and transparency of all the procedures performed [2].

While promoting donation, TC(s) should supervise the teamwork of the whole process, being aware of all legal criteria and responsible for the custody of the documents

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concerning donor evaluation, brain death determination and donor consent.

Experience of clinical coordination including waiting-list management, assessment of transplant recipients, patient education, coordination of transplant surgery activities, post-operative and outpatient clinical activities are necessary for those working in a clinical context.

In a document issued on 15 June, 2005 the Council of Europe strongly emphasized that:

“Donor co-ordinators, and any other TC(s) should have a high standard of professional training consistent with internationally recognised standards, to ensure the highest possible professional and ethical standards in organ donation and procurement. Member states should establish formal national or international accreditation for donor coordination activities/donor co-ordinators” [3].

#### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Voluntary certification of TC(s) has taken place in the United States since 1988 and has operated under the auspices of the American Board of Transplant Coordinators since its creation in 1987 [4].

The American Board for Transplant Certification is an independent, not for profit organization. Its purpose is to award a voluntary, non-governmental certification credential, “Certified Clinical TC (CCTC), Certified Procurement TC (CPTC), Certified Clinical Transplant Nurse (CCTN) and the new Certified Transplant Preservationist (CTP),” to qualified transplant professionals who have successfully passed the certification examination, which represents a standard of competence.

In the United Kingdom, training for TC(s) is not mandatory although the United Kingdom Transplant Coordinators Association has provided informal Courses since 1988. A training program for TC(s) accredited by the University of Central England, has been developed in the United Kingdom [5]. The 3 course modules have been run and managed by the Association since 1996. Between 1996 and 1999, 64 TC(s) in the United Kingdom undertook at least one module. The Association feels that the accredited training program is another step towards professional recognition of TC(s) in the United Kingdom.

In Japan Individuals that have a medical license or are recognized to have similar knowledge, and who have passed an aptitude test including curriculum vitae, paper test, and practice assessment in an emergency unit, concluding in a recruitment interview are granted certification as procurement Coordinator [6].

In Europe, the process of a voluntary certification for TC(s) started in 2001 and has been evolving in two different phases. The purpose of this article is to describe the development and evolution of the Certification process in Europe.

The process of Certification of TC(s) in Europe occurred in two related phases: the first one proposed by the European Transplant Coordinators Organization (ETCO) that

was created to evaluate healthcare professionals actively working in the field and with a minimum of previous experience, knowledge and clinical skills in all steps of the donation process. To facilitate his development and to provide an Institutional academic background, the Certification was ruled out by the University of Barcelona, with the support of the Vienna and Oporto Universities. As it was driven and under the auspices of the European Organ Exchange Organization (EOEO), the representative component of the project has being assured.

Accordingly to the main purpose of the Bologna Declaration [7] which was the creation of the European Higher Education Area by making academic degree standards and quality assurance standards more comparable and compatible throughout Europe, signed in June 1999 by the European Ministers of Education - to be implemented in 2010 - the academic recognition of titles and certificates endorsed by the European Universities was started to be modified since 2008.

Additionally, the Committee of Ministers under the terms of the Article 15b of the Statute of the Council of Europe, signed in June 2005 [3], already recommended member states to “establish formal national or international accreditation for donor co-ordination activities/donor co-ordinators”.

In 2008, the ETCO Board appointed a working group for the adaptation of the Certification process to these evolving scenario proposing that the Certification Process should be offered by an external agency with recognized expertise in certification of health professionals. Therefore, since 2010 the second phase of the Certification started under the auspices of the UEMS (Union Européenne des Medecins Specialistes).

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The process of Certification of TC(s) in Europe occurred in two phases, the first one strongly linked to the University of Barcelona (and also to the Vienna and Oporto ones) and the second one under the auspices of the UEMS.

##### 1<sup>st</sup> Phase ETCO Certification (yr 2001–2007; N = 390; Academic Support From European Universities)

The Certification Committee (CC) of the ETCO, chaired by Dr Francesco Procaccio, formally started its activity in July 1999 during the ETCO Congress held in Oslo. The committee was composed of 6 ETCO members from as many countries [8] and the 1<sup>st</sup> certification was held in 2001 during the Lisbon ETCO Congress under the ETCO Presidency of Dr. Marti Manyalich.

The main aim was to identify common core job descriptions and basic standards of practice across Europe with the help of recognised experts on Transplant Coordination, and to develop a method of Certification. An examination system based on the demonstration of basic knowledge of the whole transplant coordination process and on achieved level of competence in the field was designed [9,10].

Only actively working TC(s) with a minimum of 12 months of experience could apply and have been accepted for Certification. A written exam issued in English with 100 multiple choice questions including clinical cases was designed to evaluate general and

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