



Storm over Avi Cohen organ donation

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Israel news

The refusal of Avi Cohen's family to give away the former Israel football captain's organs has reopened a debate over the religious objections to such donations.

Mr Cohen, who also played for Liverpool in the 1980s, was hurt in a motor-cycle accident three weeks ago in the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Gan.

He lay in a coma for nine days before doctors at Ichilov Hospital told his family he was clinically dead.

Mr Cohen, 54, was a proud organ donor card carrier and had advocated that every professional footballer in the country should carry one.

His family agreed that his organs should be donated before he was taken off his life-support machine but several so-called "miracle worker" rabbis objected.

Friends say one rabbi claimed he had had a dream that Mr Cohen would come out of the coma within a week.

Others told the family that taking his organs while his heart was still beating was murder according to halachah.

The family succumbed, even though potential recipients had been told organs had been located for them.

Despite the rabbis' claims, Mr Cohen was declared dead the next day. Thousands of fans attended his funeral which began with a service at Tel Aviv's National Stadium.

The small number of Israelis willing to donate organs has led to international black market organ rings.

A number of MKs have now proposed a law that will recognise donor agreements as legally binding, preventing anyone acting against the potential donor's wishes after his or her death.

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