

## Immanuel withdraws invitation to organ-donor campaigner

BY MARK SCODIE

A PARENT-STAFF group at Immanuel College this week retracted an invitation to an American campaigner for improved levels of Jewish organ donation.

Robert Berman, founder of New York's Halachic Organ Donor society, had been invited by Yaffit Gordon, chairperson of the Immanuel College Parent-Staff Association, to speak to parents at the Bushey, Hertfordshire, secondary school in June or July.

Mr Berman, a New York-based freelance journalist and Yeshiva University graduate, encourages Orthodox Jews to carry organ-donor cards. He has previously lectured at Immanuel, and also spoke at last winter's Limmud conference in Nottingham. Mrs Gordon e-mailed him an invitation to address the PSA, telling him: "The work you are doing is brilliant."

However, after initial arrange-

ments had been made, Mrs Gordon contacted Mr Berman again last week to withdraw the invitation due to "controversy," after speaking to the school's rabbinical adviser.

"The reason given to me by the dayan was that the rabbinical sources you quote are not of high enough authority for such a topic," Mrs Gordon said in her e-mail.

"I must adhere to the advice of the rabbinical adviser to the school. The senior staff who originally okayed your talk were not aware of this problem."

Mr Berman maintained that the dayan cited was Dayan Chanoch Ehrentreu, the head of the London Beth Din, who he said had urged at least two London rabbis to disavow his work in the wake of his visit here last year.

Dayan Ehrentreu, who was attending a meeting of the Conference of European Rabbis, was unavailable for comment this week, as were Mrs Gordon and Immanuel's headmaster, Philip Skelker.

However, David Katz, professor of immunology and pathology at University College, London, who advises the Chief Rabbi on medical issues, said that the controversy arose because Mr Berman's views differed from the London Beth Din's on the definition of death.

Mr Berman's organisation offers a flexible policy under which donors have the option of offering organs after brain-stem death — as allowed by some Orthodox rabbis — or according to the more established Jewish view that death occurs only when the heart stops.

Professor Katz said: "The issue is that he isn't qualified to speak about the UK situation. There are different sensitivities here. The London Beth Din's position is to judge each situation individually."

Mr Berman told the JC he was also due to lecture on July 3 at Chigwell and Hainault Synagogue in Essex. Chigwell's Rabbi Baruch Davis said this week the booking "has not been finalised" by the synagogue board.