

Letters To The Editor

Organ donation issue needs to be debated

WHAT A TRAGEDY that debate is stifled on such an important issue as organ donation at an institution such as Immanuel College (JC, May 7). Professor David Katz suggests that the withdrawal of the invitation to Robert Berman to speak is due to "Mr Berman's views [differing] from the London Beth Din's on the definition of death." Yet while the Halachic Organ Donation Society assumes some kind of donation is acceptable to most authorities, it does not take a position on the definition of death.

Mr Berman clearly stated at his lectures earlier this year that he is not issuing halachic rulings. He is rightly trying to stimulate debate on this vital issue.

It is not enough for the London Beth Din to "judge each situation individually." Many of us want religious guidance on the correctness of carrying a donor card and clear reasons to defend ourselves if it is halachically wrong to do so.

This issue is of immense public

importance and interest. We are constantly advised of the lack of donor organs. Attempts have repeatedly been made to legislate an "opt-out" rather than the current "opt-in" approach with regard to organ donation. In some European countries this is already the position. It is surely only a matter of time before Britain follows suit.

Let us debate this issue. Let us hear such powerful advocates as Mr Berman — and let our rabbinical authorities offer us clear, unambiguous guidance.

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HAVING HEARD Robby Berman lecture about halachah and organ donation in December 2003, I learnt many interesting things, not least of which was that there are prominent Israeli rabbis who hold a "halachic organ donor card," among them the chief rabbis of Haifa, Bet El and Efrat.

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IT'S A REAL shame that Immanuel College felt compelled to withdraw its invitation to Robert Berman.

The halachah does not speak in one voice on the issue of organ donation, which is not surprising given the complexity of this area.

Surely the way forward is through education and open discussion rather than silencing those who want to raise awareness of this important issue. After all, what is greater than saving a life?

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NOW, LET ME get this clear. At Immanuel College, you can have an exchange of ideas and opinions so long as the rabbinical adviser (aka the thought policeman) says you can? One can only wonder what further steps are taken at the school to stifle the spirit of inquiry and the free expression of opinion.

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