

Key Points

- The government recognises that the functions currently undertaken by the HTA are essential in ensuring the safe and ethical use of human tissue and organs.
- The HTA was set up in response to the organ retention scandals which caused public outrage. In the last five years the HTA has turned this public confidence crisis around. However improvement is by no means universal or embedded – the reasons why we were set up have not gone away.
- We believe that current proposals to split up and transfer our functions to different organisations risk undermining the progress that has been made.

Public Bodies Bill Committee Stage

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BRIEFING

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Keep the HTA functions together

“Dividing would be diluting. That would be going back down the hill in terms of protecting patients’ rights to exercise informed consent” says Roger Goss from Patient Concern.

The HTA is the guardian of consent; splitting it up would risk different interpretations and creating potentially lower/conflicting standards in different sectors over time. It would increase the regulatory burden across the sectors we regulate and damage public confidence that has been so hard won.

Regulatory burden

“It is very reassuring to know there is a national organisation that checks everything is done properly for patients and professionals. The HTA protects the interests of those involved in transplants and the reputation of research and transplantation in the UK” says Dr. Vassilios Papalois, Consultant Transplant Surgeon, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust.

The sectors we regulate benefit from a ‘one stop shop’ approach to key issues, such as consent and a reduced regulatory burden, because we work across overlapping sectors such as transplantation and research. Splitting the HTA’s function is therefore likely to increase the regulatory burden e.g. it would mean at least 200 organisations, in the research sector being regulated by two, rather than one regulator.

Minimising costs

“All the effort and soul searching that went into the establishing of the HTA cannot afford to be overthrown by abolishing it and splitting its functions” says the Brethren Christian Fellowship (UK).

The HTA is recognised as an efficient regulator with a clear focus on improving value for money. We’re a lean organisation costing only £1m in government grant and reducing that by 14% in cash terms next year. Splitting our functions is likely to lead to a more complex and expensive delivery model.

Transparency and accountability

“Proposals to abolish the Authority and the divisions of its functions among larger, non-specialist regulators – risk confusion and error in the implementation of the Human tissue Act 2004, which in turn will erode public confidence” says Margaret Brazier, Professor Medical Law, Manchester University.

As a single body the HTA has a single line of accountability for decisions regarding the safe and ethical use of human tissue, creating a fault line in this clear direction, by splitting up its responsibilities, will make it less accountable.