

## **Optometrists must take note of illegal organ harvesting**

A Sydney optometrist and private practice owner, Sophia Bryskine says it is time for all medical professionals to take note of the unethical organ removal practices still prevalent in the region.

"Forced organ harvesting from unwilling donors, which includes harvesting of corneas, is a crime against humanity and we must not turn a blind eye," says Mrs Bryskine, who has recently started to work with an international NGO Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting (DAFOH).

"As primary healthcare professionals we have a responsibility to know about these practices, so that if the question comes up we can provide accurate information to our patients," she says.

While there are no known cases of forced organ removal in Australia, the practice is prolific in the region and Australians are not shy to reap the benefits.

In China it takes 1-2 weeks to receive a cornea or a kidney at a cost of at least \$30,000. In Australia the waiting periods are well beyond 2 years.

"There are dozens of Australians who have travelled to China for quick surgeries. The horrific thing is that someone will actually be murdered for that transplant operation to take place," says Mrs Bryskine.

Indeed mounting evidence tells a terrible tale of murder and mutilation. The story was first revealed in March 2006, when a woman claimed that as many as 4,000 practitioners of the Falun Gong spiritual practice had been killed for their organs at the hospital in which she had worked.

She also said that her husband, a surgeon at the same hospital outside the north-eastern city of Shenyang, had disclosed to her that he had removed corneas from the living bodies of 2,000 Falun Gong adherents.

Falun Gong is a mind and body practice that has been under severe persecution in China since 1999 due to the practice's unprecedented popularity in the 1990s. Falun Gong is believed to be the largest single group of prisoners of conscience in China and hence form the largest "live non-consenting organ bank" in the world.

According to the research by the UK-based investigative journalist and award-winning writer Ethan Gutmann, at least 65,000 Falun Gong practitioners have been murdered for their organs between 2000 and 2008. That is equivalent to more than the entire population of Wagga Wagga being wiped out in less than a decade.

In November 2013 DAFOH spearheaded a historic petition to the United National Commissioner on Human Rights. A total of 1.5 million signatures were raised around the world urging an immediate end to forced organ harvesting in China. Yet to date no response has been received from the UN.

"We sense that until there is more awareness of this horrific practice in the world, especially amongst the medical field, the killing of thousands of people will continue," says Mrs Bryskine.