

ANATOMICAL DONATION

Death provides many of us with a one-time chance to make a valuable gift to humanity. Organ and eye donation at a time of death can be the gift of life or sight to the recipient. All major religions approve of organ donation.

Whole body donations are needed for training doctors, dentists, health professionals, EMTs, and funeral directors. Research on the human body has advanced medical science.

Organ Donation – The Gift of Life

With the advances in medical science in the last decade, organ transplants have become common and the need for donated organs far exceeds the supply.

If your wish is to aid the living through donation, make sure your next-of-kin and your physician know your preference. This intent should be noted in your advance directives and medical records.

Procedures for donors to give first-person consent vary by state. Most sign up at their local DMV, others use donor cards or on-line registries. The family is not able to overturn the donor's decision in some states. Go to www.donatelife.net and select "Commit to Donation" to see the current situation in your state.

Eye Donation

Circumstances surrounding death may limit donation options, yet the corneas of even elderly donors will be gratefully accepted.

Tissue Donation

Unlike organ and eye donation, tissue donation in the United States is not well regulated nor is there a system of allocation based upon need. According to the American Association of Tissue Banks, there is not an acute shortage of tissue as is the case with organs and eyes.

In some states you can indicate on your driver's license that you are an organ, eye **and/or tissue** donor. The rules vary by state, so please check with your state Department of Motor Vehicles.

Unless the person authorizing the donation specifies the use, the body parts may be used for commercial purposes. Processed tissues are sold for transplant, dermatology, research, training purposes or made into a range of products often not resembling the original gift.

Often donors are not adequately informed about the uses of donated tissues or the money being made from them. Ask questions; make an informed decision.

Whole Body Donation

Donating a whole body can be done two ways . . .

1. Medical schools have an ongoing need for bodies for teaching and research. No medical school buys bodies, but there is usually little or no expense for the family when death occurs. Therefore, if you live in an area where low-cost funeral options do not exist, body donation may be an economical as well as thoughtful and generous choice. Because it

is important for the medical school to start preservation soon after death, hopefully within 24 hours, a viewing is generally not possible. A memorial service may be an appropriate option, though. In addition, most medical schools and students will hold a memorial service for the donors.

Some medical schools pay for nearby transportation and cremation, but others do not. The school may have a contract with a particular firm for transporting bodies, so it is important to inquire about the specific arrangements to be used at the time of death in order to avoid added costs. In other cases, schools take no responsibility for transportation, and we've heard of some outrageous fees from funeral homes. **As always, shop around in advance.**

After medical study, the body is usually cremated and the cremated remains buried in a university plot or scattered. Some medical schools return the remains to the family for final disposition within a year or two, if requested in advance.

Most medical schools require that a donor register before death. However, in some cases, next-of-kin may make the bequest without prior arrangement. Some medical schools will not accept a body if the next of kin or the deceased's legal representative objects. Schools will also reject bodies that have had organs or tissues removed.

If death occurs at such a distance that it would not be practical to transport the body back to the school to which the donation was originally made, consider offering the body to the nearest medical school. If you move you should consider revoking your donation

and making a new donation to a medical school in your new location.

2, Anatomical Firms. Commercial and non-profit organizations collect bodies so almost all the parts, organs, and tissues can be used for bio-medical and pharmaceutical research, experiments, training, and transplantation. Some companies do not adequately disclose what the body will be used for, how much money changes hands and between whom, and some don't screen bodies carefully enough for disease. In some cases, these organizations pay funeral homes for handling and shipping bodies. While some states are moving to regulate these practices, there's no uniformity and not much oversight.

Some of the tissue banks, however, do a better job of informing donors and families about their procedures. You should exercise caution and take the time to thoroughly understand what will happen if you decide to use one of these companies. If you're concerned about what your body will be used for, ask detailed questions.

Suitability of Body Donation

There are factors and conditions that may render the body unacceptable for medical donation and may not be obvious until the time of death. These may include: certain infectious diseases, an autopsy, amputation, obesity or disfiguration due to disease or accident.

Some medical schools may not have an immediate need or may have no provision for storage or for sharing with another university. Some medical schools with an excess of donated bodies will make them available to the anatomical companies discussed previ-

ously. Always have a backup plan for body disposition and discuss it with your family. Direct cremation is the next simplest and least expensive way to go.

Mortuary Schools

If arrangements for whole body donation have not been made in advance, another option is donation to one of the 53 *Schools of Mortuary Science* in the country. These schools teach embalming and preparation of bodies for viewing. Donated bodies are not dissected and the cremated remains are usually returned to the family within a few weeks.

Additional Resources

Funeral Consumers Alliance

<http://www.funerals.org/>

Funeral Ethics Organization

<http://www.funeralethics.org>

US Department of Health & Human Services

<http://www.hhs.gov/>

Medline Plus

<http://medlineplus.gov/>

Donate Life America

<http://www.donatelife.net>

Eye Bank Association of America

<http://www.restoresight.org/links/links.htm>

American Association of Tissue Banks

<http://www.aatb.org/>

Organ, Eye, Tissue, and Whole Body Donation



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