

Organ, Tissue & Body Donation

Death provides many of us with a one-time chance to make a valuable gift to humanity. All major religions approve of body, tissue and organ donation for medical and dental teaching, research, and transplants. According to public opinion polls, most people believe that such donations are desirable.

With the advances in medical science in the last decade, organ and tissue transplants have become fairly common. Organ donation at a time of death is a gift of life or sight to the recipient.

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

If your wish is to aid the living with an organ donation, make sure your next-of-kin and your physician know your preference. This intent should be noted on any medical or hospital records, too. A body from which organs have been removed will not be accepted for medical study.

Medical schools have an ongoing need of bodies for teaching and research. The need may be especially urgent at osteopathic and chiropractic schools. 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.

Most medical schools pay for nearby transportation as well as embalming and final disposition. 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.

After medical study, the body is usually cremated, with burial or scattering in a university plot. Often the cremains or remains can be returned to the family for burial within a year or two. This request should be made known at the time of donation.

Some medical schools require that a donor register before death. However, in many cases, next-of-kin may make the bequest without prior arrangement.

Because it is important for the medical school to start preservation as soon after death as possible, a memorial service is most appropriate for those planning on body donation.

Alternative plans for body disposition should be discussed with your family. A few schools take care of disposition regardless of condition at the time of death, in fulfillment of their contract with a donor. Most medical schools, however, follow guidelines in the acceptance of a body. If death occurs at the time of surgery, for example, the body would not be accepted for study. Certain diseases, as well as obesity, make a body unsuitable. Some medical schools may not have an immediate need and have no provision for storage or for sharing with another university.

There are special considerations if death occurs while you are traveling and you planned on body donation. If you are far from the medical school of your choice, should your family bear the cost of transporting your body there or may the nearest university be contacted?

The need for cadavers in some foreign countries is even greater than in the U.S. For

example, in Argentina 200 medical students must share a cadaver. A private individual's body may be shipped to another country if placed in a hermetically sealed container.

If death were to occur abroad, do you wish your survivors to inquire about the local need for bodies or organs to fulfill the intent of your anatomical bequest? Be sure to note your preference on the Uniform Donor Card you carry.

Because of recent scandals regarding the sale of human organs, tissue and cadavers for profit, we advise you to do your homework and only make such donations to reputable, and only make such donations to reputable, non-profit agencies. The agencies listed on the back of this pamphlet are highly respected non-profits serving the Pacific Northwest. Others advertise under the guise of offering free cremation, but may not result in the most ethical use of your remains.

In your death, you have an opportunity to benefit others through transplantation and the advancement of medical science. Consider making this last gift through a reputable agency—leaving the world just a little bit better place.



Washington State Resources:

The Living Legacy Registry
1-877-275-5269
www.livinglegacyregistry.org

LifeCenter Northwest
1-877-275-5269
www.lcnw.org

**U.W. School of Medicine
Willed Body Program**
206-543-1860
wbp.biostr.washington.edu

Lions Eye Bank
206-652-8500
www.nleb.org

Northwest Tissue Center
206-292-1879
www.nwtc.org

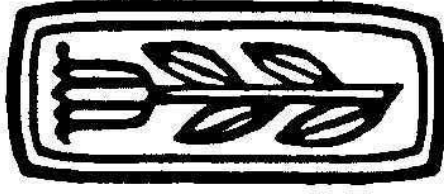
Additional Resources

Dealing Creatively With Death: A Manual of Death Education and Burial by Ernest Morgan. Upper Access, 160 pp. \$14.95

Caring for the Dead: Your Final Act of Love by Lisa Carlson. Upper Access, 640 pp. \$29.95

To order these books, contact the Funeral Consumer's Alliance at www.funerals.org or 1-800-765-0107

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