

# **Donating Your Body To Medical Science through The University of Tennessee Health Science Center, College of Medicine, Department of Anatomy and Neurobiology**

## **That Others May Live...**

### **THE PROBLEM**

Examination of the dead to gain knowledge of the living has been practiced since ancient times. Today, knowledge of the human body obtained by study of the dead is absolutely indispensable to the education of tomorrow's physicians, dentists and other health care professionals and to biomedical research. For its current programs, The University of Tennessee Health Science Center needs more than 100 bodies each year from the over 5,000 residents of Tennessee and nearby states who die annually.

In Tennessee, as in other states, the bodies of those that are unclaimed by relatives are allocated by law to medical institutions. But most people can afford conventional funeral procedures, and various social welfare programs aid most of the few who need help. Thus, there are now almost no unclaimed bodies, although the increasing need for health care workers requires more bodies for biomedical education and research than ever before.

### **THE SOLUTION**

The solution lies in the increasing number of people who choose to give their bodies, after death, to medical science.

Recognizing the need for such gifts, all states have enacted uniform legislation providing for or clarifying the rights of those who wish to donate all or parts of their bodies after death to the advancement of medical education. Tennessee adopted one of the first such laws in 1969. The University of Tennessee Health Science Center operates within the framework of this law and other legislation, and makes every effort to answer a family's questions or concerns when accepting the gift of a body.

### **THE DECISION**

The decision to donate one's body for medical teaching and research should be made only after a great deal of thought. Those considering such a donation should discuss it with their families and, if they choose, with a family physician, attorney or clergyman. *Failure to make the decision known to others may defeat all advance arrangements made by donors.*

### **SOME CONSIDERATIONS IN MAKING YOUR DECISION**

Here are the answers to some common questions about the policies and practices of the Anatomy Bequest Program at The University of Tennessee Health Science Center. If you have other questions, please contact us at:

Anatomical Bequest Program  
Department of Anatomy and Neurobiology  
College of Medicine  
The University of Tennessee Health Science Center  
855 Monroe Avenue  
Memphis, Tennessee 38163

Or by dialing:  
901-448-5978 (business hours)  
901-448-2640 (after hours)

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**Q: What if I change my mind after signing papers making the bequest?**

A: Simply write stating that you wish to revoke the bequest. The University will cancel the bequest, and, if you so request, return your signature document.

**Q: What reassurance can I give my family concerning the final disposition of my body?**

A: After our studies are complete - usually 18 or more months after death - The University will cremate the body and have the ashes interred in a local cemetery at no cost to the donor's family or estate. Should special arrangements - such as return of the ashes for private burial - be desired, The University will cooperate, but cannot pay costs (including transportation) of such arrangements.

**Q: Except for burial, can a funeral or memorial services be held prior to delivery of a body?**

A: Yes, either type may be carried out in the usual manner. The funeral director must confer with The University for special preparation and delivery instructions. Since The University cannot assume funeral or memorial costs, all such expenses must be paid by the donor's family or estate.

**Q: What circumstances might cause refusal of a donation?**

A: A few causes of death lead to refusal. They include an explosion or a destructive accident, or conditions resulting in excessive obesity or emaciation may make a body unsuitable for our purposes. An autopsy or removal of organs other than the eyes also may make a body unacceptable for our programs. The University reserves the right to refuse any bequest.

**Q: What if a donor dies while not in Tennessee?**

A: Usually The University is unable to bear the added costs for donations from other states. If the survivors or estate cannot pay the costs of preparation and transfer, we can frequently arrange to transfer the bequest to a medical school in the state where death occurred.

**Q: What expenses to family or estate are connected with donating one's body?**

A: None. That is, unless death occurs outside of Tennessee, or if there are special arrangements departing from the usual procedures of The University.

**Q: Do diseases or advanced age destroy the usefulness of the body?**

A: No. Diseases or age usually are not factors for whole body donation, but are critical factors for tissue and organ donation. Most conditions that make tissues and organs unsuitable for transplantation do not affect anatomical studies.

**Q: Does arranging to donate one's body also take care of organ and tissue donation?**

A: No. For complete anatomical study, the body usually must be intact. Removal of tissues or organs for transplant or banking makes the body unsuitable for teaching and research. The University reserves the right to decline the bequest if such procedures make the body valueless for our studies. Your family physician (or The University) can advise you about contacting tissue banks and organ transplantation programs in your area.

**Q: Does a donor's family receive a report of findings when studies are completed?**

A: No. The nature of our studies makes it impractical to report details to families or their representatives. Similarly, although our utilization of donated bodies contributes to advances in biomedical science, we cannot guarantee that an individual donation will be used to increase knowledge of any particular disease or clinical condition.

**Q: Can a body donation be made if arrangements were not complete before death?**

A: Often it can, if relatives know and want to carry out the wishes of the deceased. However, the next-of-kin must contact us as soon as possible after death. If The University does accept the donation, relatives must sign a form releasing the body for education and research. When death occurs outside of Shelby County, donations by next-of-kin normally are accepted

only if the costs of special embalming following our procedures, and transfer to Memphis by a funeral home, are paid by the family or estate of the deceased.

**Q: Are any payments made for donation of bodies?**

A: No. Actually it is illegal to buy or sell human bodies. For those who have filed bequests while living, The University usually assumes the costs of special embalming, and transportation from most parts of Tennessee. If the distance is great, or if death occurs out of Tennessee, The University may decline the bequest unless the survivors or estate of the deceased pay for necessary preparation and transfer.

**Q: May friends and/or relatives make contributions to the Anatomy Bequest Program, Department of Anatomy and Neurobiology in my memory?**

A: Yes. Gifts will be acknowledged for the donor and to your family. Funds from such gifts will be used only for medical education and research.

## **THE PROCEDURE**

The decision to donate one's body can be carried out by properly executing and returning to The University simple forms that are available on request. (See address and phone contacts on the back of this pamphlet.) The bequest becomes effective when The University acknowledges the donation and sends an identification card.

Even when a bequest is fully described in a last will and testament, signed bequest forms must be returned to The University of Tennessee Health Science Center. Often a will does not receive consideration until funeral and burial procedures have been completed. The University does not accept bequests made on forms other than the one we provide.