

The Need

The human body has been an invaluable and indispensable aid in medical education and research for centuries. A thorough understanding of anatomy is fundamental to medical science and can only be achieved by studying the human body.

The need to educate and train more physicians, dentists, and other health care professionals in our state requires an increase in the supply of anatomical gifts.

The Source

The principal source of anatomical gifts is the selfless act of private donation. Recognizing the need for such gifts, the Mississippi Legislature passed the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act (UAGA) in 1970 clarifying the rights of persons who wish to bequeath their bodies, after death, to medical science.

The Program

UMMC's body donation program was created in accordance with the UAGA to provide human anatomical material for use in the education and research programs of the institution and in the education programs of the state. The UMMC Department of Neurobiology and Anatomical Sciences manages the body donation program, and operates within the framework of the UAGA.

The Procedure

The procedure is simple. Complete the authorization and preregistration form, and sign it in the presence of two witnesses or a notary. The signed form satisfies legal requirements governing such gifts. Within 45 days of submitting the form, donors will receive an acknowledgment letter and a donor card, and the donor's name will be placed on the body donation pre-registry. To be certain their wishes are followed, donors should tell their family, friends, physician, and attorney about their decision.



Body Donation Program
Department of Neurobiology
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The Ultimate Gift

Donating Your Body
to Medical Science





Frequently Asked Questions About Donating Your Body

Who may donate?

Anyone 18 or older who is of sound mind may donate their body and pre-register by completing the authorization form.

Who can make an anatomical donation?

Donations are only accepted if the prospective donor or his or her representative (i.e. medical power of attorney) has properly completed the authorization form.

Can a prospective donor change his or her mind after the form has been signed?

Yes, prospective donors may cancel the bequest at any time by notifying the body donation program in writing.

Are all anatomical gifts acceptable?

No. While our staff make every effort to honor someone's wish to donate, each potential donor's medical history must carefully be reviewed at the time of death with the health care provider or family before final acceptance into the program is granted.

Reasons a donation cannot be accepted include, but are not limited to:

- Death occurring outside of Mississippi
- Death caused by suicide or extreme trauma
- Disputes about the donation by the next of kin or legal authorizing agent
- Notification of death not received in a timely manner
- The presence of certain infectious diseases, such as hepatitis, AIDS, MRSA, etc.
- Extreme obesity or severe wasting
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin), excessive fluid retention, decomposition, or body resting in fetal position
- Embalmed or autopsied body
- Removal of organ or tissue for organ donation, except for corneas
- The required number of donated bodies has been exceeded

Program staff encourage all potential donors to make alternative arrangements should their donation be declined.

Is body donation different than organ donation?

Yes. None of the organs from the donated body will be used for transplantation purposes. However, our staff will cooperate with the Lions Eye Bank should the donor wish for his or her corneas to be donated. Donors may register with us and indicate their wish to be an eye organ donor on their driver's licenses. For more information about organ and tissue donation, call the Mississippi Organ Recovery Agency at 601.933.1000.

Is payment made in connection with a donated body?

No. It is illegal to buy or sell bodies in all 50 states.

What expense does the donor's family or estate incur upon his or her death?

Ordinarily none. UMMC will transport the body from anywhere in Mississippi and embalm and cremate it at no cost to the family or estate of the donor. However, donors should expect to pay a minimal fee to the Mississippi Department of Health for copies of the death certificate.

Can a donation come from out of state?

No, body donations are only accepted if the death occurs in Mississippi. The family may pursue donation to an institution close to where the donor passed.

What if the donor's death occurs away from his or her home?

Those who usually would be informed of the donor's death should be aware of the decision to become a donor and promptly report the death to our office at 601.984.1649.

Should a funeral home be contacted?

It is not necessary to involve a local funeral home. We will arrange for removal of the body at no cost to the family or estate of the donor. Our office will not pay the cost of removal by a local funeral home unless it is done at the institution's request.

Can a funeral or memorial services take place before delivery of a body?

Most donors elect to have a memorial service without the body being present. Embalming will render the body unacceptable for donation, even if it is preregistered.

How much time is required for scientific study?

This will vary. Generally, it will take about two years from the arrival of the body at UMMC to completion of the study. In some instances, the time required may be more or less than two years.

What happens to the remains after the scientific study is concluded?

The remains will be cremated. Donors may request for the cremains to be returned to surviving relatives for final disposition. Cremains not requested to be returned to the family will be buried in the cemetery on the UMMC campus. Neither option would involve any expense to the family or donor's estate. UMMC also holds a ceremony of appreciation in memory of anatomical donors each spring.

What should be done when the donor dies?

When death occurs, the body donation program should be notified immediately. The donor's health care providers, relatives, or the coroner may call 601.984.1649, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They may also call UMMC's main number at 601.984.1000 and ask for the body donation program.

To verify that the deceased is preregistered, callers should be prepared to give the donor's name as listed on the registry, social security number, and/or date of birth. The donor will be screened for acceptability into the program during the initial call.