

# BUREAU OF ANATOMICAL SERVICES

## ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT DONATING YOUR BODY, AFTER DEATH, TO MEDICAL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

- Q.** *Why are human bodies donated to the Bureau of Anatomical Services or one of its member institutions? A. They are an indispensable aid in medical teaching and research. The basis of all medical knowledge is human anatomy; human anatomy can be learned only by a study of the human body. Without this study there could be no doctors, no surgery, no alleviation of disease or repair of injury.*
- Q.** *Is this a normal and acceptable procedure? A. Definitely yes.*
- Q.** *Are there religious objections to donating one's body to medical science? A. The practice is approved, and even encouraged, by Catholic, Protestant and Reformed Jewish religious leaders.*
- Q.** *Is there an urgent need for body donations? A. The need is great and will be further increased by the demand for more doctors, dentists, nurses and other health service practitioners. A lack of anatomical subjects would necessitate a curtailment of vitally important teaching and research programs and thus have an adverse effect on the health and welfare of the population.*
- Q.** *Is donating one's body difficult or complicated? A. No, it is a very simple and easy process. One needs only to complete a donation form which requires a few items of information, the donor's signature, the signature of two witnesses, and it also needs to be notarized.*
- Q.** *Can a donation take place against the wishes of the spouse or next of kin? A. Under the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act, your wishes take legal precedence over those of your next of kin. However, the BAS is not inclined to accept a body under conditions in which there is an objection to donation or dissension among members of the family who are legally responsible for final disposition of the body. Donors are advised to notify all persons likely to be concerned of their intentions and plans to make a donation of their body. In this way, any difference of opinion can be resolved in advance of the time of death when decisions must be made in haste and under the handicap of grief.*
- Q.** *Can the next of kin donate the body of a recently deceased relative to medical science? A. In some instances donations may be made by the next of kin. However, since previously registered donors are given first priority, the family or hospital must contact the BAS on an individual basis to see if there is a need at the moment. When this is done, the following release statement should accompany the body:*  
*\* I/We, (the person(s)' name), being the nearest next of kin [as outlined in RS: ] or by individual having legal authority for final disposition to (name of deceased) do hereby agree to release his/her body to the Bureau of Anatomical Services (or University of choice) for medical education and/or research.\**
- Q.** *Must a person be of legal age to sign a donation form? A. Yes, a donor and all witnesses must be at least 18 years of age and there is no maximum age limit.*
- Q.** *How are bodies that are donated utilized? A. Many bodies are used to teach medical, dental, nursing and allied health students' basic human anatomy. Some are used by the faculty and residents to develop new surgical or diagnostic procedures. Others are utilized for Post Graduate course and continuing education for practicing Health Care providers. This is not comparable to an autopsy. No reports of any kind are furnished to the donor's family.*
- Q.** *May I alter, cancel or revoke my donation if I change my mind? A. Yes, at any time by notifying the BAS in writing of your desire to cancel your donation. In contact of these uses we do not have the capability of performing an autopsy; therefore, no reports of any kind are furnished to the donor's family of the cause of death and diseases, etc.*
- Q.** *Will I or my family be paid for my body? A. No. Payment to individuals for an anatomical donation is not permitted by federal and state laws/regulations.*

- Q.** Will signing the back of my driver's license ensure that my remains are given to your program? **A.** No. Signing the back of your driver's license will not get your whole body donated to science. Your signature on the back of your driver's license allows medical personnel to harvest designated organs from your body for transplant purposes, but usually under optimum conditions only.
- Q.** Are bodies acceptable if the eyes have been donated to other agencies? **A.** Yes. Eyes can be donated to other agencies, but it is the donor's responsibility to contact and register with those agencies. We cannot accept donors that have donated their vital organs. The telephone numbers for donation agencies are:  
Louisiana Organ Procurement Agency - (504) 837-3355  
Your Local Eye Bank – (504) 891-3937
- Q.** Are there any restrictions on the condition of bodies accepted? **A.** Normally, most bodies are acceptable. However, we are unable to accept the remains of persons who die when an infectious disease present, such as COVID-19, AIDS, hepatitis, sepsis, etc. COVID cases are evaluated on case-by-case basis. Remains will also be refused if an autopsy or embalming has been performed or should the President of the Bureau deem the body unsuitable. You should have an alternative plan for the disposition of your body in the event it is not accepted by BAS.
- Q.** What is the time period before utilization of the body is completed? **A.** This will vary markedly according to the medical education and research, but because of COVID-19 courses were cancelled. We are approximately running 1 year behind. We strive to return your loved ones to you as soon as possible.
- Q.** What if my death occurs away from my place of residence? **A.** An identification card, stating that the request has been made, is provided by the BAS. This card should be carried in your purse or wallet at all times (the donor would be wise to note on the card the name of the person(s) to be notified in the event of sudden and unexpected death).
- Q.** What if my death occurs in another state? **A.** Your family could attempt to donate your remains to a similar donor program in that state. Or, if it is still your family's wish to honor your original donation of your remains to the BAS, they may do so, but will incur the transportation charges to have your remains returned to Louisiana.
- Q.** What if I should move to another state? **A.** The original bequest should be revoked in writing and a substitute arrangement be made with a similar program nearest your new home unless your family estate or survivors opt to honor your original request in which the family will pay the transportation charges to transport your remains to Louisiana.
- Q.** Must I be a resident of Louisiana to donate my body? **A.** As of January 1994, the Bureau discontinued taking new donations from outside the State of Louisiana. However, a prospective donor who lives outside of Louisiana, if the family agrees to pay transportation, the remains may be accepted by the Bureau of Anatomical Services. Out of State agreement must be filled out in which the person responsible accepts the payment of transportation. (Copies of this form are available upon request.)
- Q.** May a customary or traditional type of funeral service be held prior to the transfer of the body to the Bureau for Anatomical Services? **A.** We do not recommend that a traditional funeral service be held. If the family wishes to conduct a service, we suggest that they hold a memorial service.
- Q.** What organization should my family contact to request a death certificate? **A.** We provide the first death certificate free of charge and each additional certificate is \$7. If more copies are required, please call Professional Funeral Services 504-948-7447. The death certificate can ONLY go to the next of kin listed on the donor form. For insurance and banking purposes, a certified death certificate is required and can be obtained from the contracted funeral home (for a additional fee) or from:  
Vital Records Registry  
P. O. Box 60630 or VitalChek (877) 605-8562  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70160-0630 [www.vitalcheck.com](http://www.vitalcheck.com)  
(504) 593-5100

\* Allow eight weeks or longer from the time of death for the death certificate to be processed.

- Q.** *What happens when the utilization of the donation is concluded? A. The remains will be cremated. If requested (in writing) to do so, the Bureau will return the ashes, in a suitable container, to the person listed on the donor form, if no one is listed we will contact next of kin at time of death. If you want to give additional contact information on eligible persons to receive the remains, please do so on the donor form. If no such request is made, the ashes will be buried in a cemetery designated for the BAS with an appropriate ceremony.*
- Q.** *Does the heart on my license sign me up to be a body donation donor? A. No. Body donation is different from being an organ donor. Each program requires you to sign up separately. You can be an organ donor and a body donation donor, but it depends on the situation if you will be accepted into the body donation program.*