

Body Donation: The Importance of Informed Consent

Consumer interest in whole body donation is on the rise. Typically, the public considers body donation an altruistic act that makes body parts, organs, and tissue available for research, bio-product development, and demonstration of new devices. However, in a May 19, 2003, Boston Herald article, the chairman of the Health Law Department of Boston University's School of Public Health said, "The market for body parts has become very lavish—skin, brain, heart valves are not just used for research but are part of a for-profit industry now. People need to be informed of this."

This is just one reason that a crucial element of any organ, tissue, or whole body donation process is the informed consent of the donor and/or the family, which should, at an absolute minimum, include a voluntary decision based on full disclosure of the facts.

The following questions will help you get the information you need:

1. What professional accreditations, if any, does this organization have?
2. Is this a nonprofit organization?
3. May I be an organ, tissue or eye donor for living recipients before my body is donated for research or education?
4. What information about me must be provided by my family?
5. What costs will my family be required to pay?
6. What diseases or conditions at time of death would make my body unacceptable for donation?
7. Will you accept a body that has been autopsied?
8. Which tissues, organs, and body parts will be allocated?
9. For what purpose will the donated tissue, organs, and body parts be used?
10. If remains are to be used for research, can I or my family specify that the research be limited to a particular disease or condition?
11. What limitations can be placed on the use of tissues, organs, and body parts?
12. What entities will receive which allocated tissues, organs, and body parts? (If a recipient is a research program or the purpose is educational, the family should be told the name of the organization, the program, the specific body parts provided, and the location of the organizational recipient.)
13. What parts of the body will be included in cremated remains returned to the family?
14. Who can my family contact for additional information, and how can they be contacted?