

## RECOMMENDATIONS OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR THE DONATION AND STUDY OF HUMAN BODIES AND TISSUES FOR ANATOMICAL EXAMINATION

The study of human cadavers is essential for teaching, advanced training and research in medical and anatomical sciences. Institutions<sup>1</sup> rely on the donation of bodies by the general public, and are immensely grateful to donors. However, it is imperative that institutions follow procedures of the highest ethical standards in order to give donors full confidence in their decision to donate. Transparency regarding the use of human material and institutional procedures increases public trust and in turn increases public support of body donation.

1. Informed consent from donors must be obtained in writing before any bequest can be accepted.<sup>2</sup> Consent forms should take into account the following:
  - a. Donors must be entirely free in their decision to donate, this excludes donation by minors and prisoners condemned to death.
  - b. Although not essential, good practice is encouraged by having the next of kin also sign the form.
  - c. Whether the donor consents to their medical records being accessed.
2. There should be no commercialisation in relation to bequests of human remains for anatomical education and research. This applies to the bequest process itself, where the decision to donate should be free from financial considerations, and also to the uses to which the remains are put following bequest. If bodies, body parts, or plastinated specimens are to be supplied to other institutions for educational or research purposes this may not yield commercial gain. However, charging for real costs incurred, including the cost of maintaining a body donation program and preparation and transport costs, is considered appropriate. Payment for human material *per se* is not acceptable.
3. There needs to be an urgent move towards the establishment of guidelines regulating the transport of human bodies, or body parts, within and between countries.
4. Specimens must be treated with respect at all times. This includes, but is not limited to, storing and displaying human and non-human animal parts separately.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “institution” is intended to refer throughout to a university, medical school or anatomy department as appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> This excludes the use of unclaimed bodies.

5. The normal practice is to retain donor anonymity. Any exceptions to this should be formally agreed to beforehand by the bequestee and, if appropriate, the family.
6. Limits need to be placed on the extent to which images, or other artefacts produced from donations are placed in the public domain, including in social media, both to respect the privacy of the donor (and their surviving relatives) and to prevent arousing morbid curiosity. No individual should be identifiable in images.
7. A clear and rigorous legal framework should be established on a national and/or state level. This legal framework should detail:
  - a. The procedures to be followed in accepting bequests of human remains for anatomical examination, including who is responsible for human remains after death.
  - b. The formal recognition of institutions which may accept bequests, which in some jurisdictions may involve licensing.
  - c. The safe and secure storage of human remains within institutions.
  - d. The length of time such remains will be retained by the institution.
  - e. The procedures to be followed in disposing of remains once the anatomical examination is complete and they are no longer required for anatomical education and research.
8. Institutional procedures should be formally established by an oversight committee, which shall review the body donation program at regular intervals. Such procedures should include the following:
  - a. Copies of the bequest should be retained both by the donor and by the institution for whom the bequest is intended.
  - b. Records should be kept for a minimum of twenty years from the date of disposal to ensure that human material can be identified as originating from a specific donor.
  - c. Good conservation procedures should be employed throughout the entire period during which the human remains are retained to ensure that the most effective use is made of any bequest received.
  - d. Efficient tracking procedures should ensure that the identity and location of all body parts from an individual donor are known at all times.
  - e. Facilities where cadavers are used must be appropriate for the storage of human remains and secured from entry by unauthorized personnel.
9. There needs to be transparency between the institution and potential donors and their relatives at every stage, from the receipt of an initial

enquiry to the final disposal of the remains. The clear communication of information should include but not necessarily be limited to the production of an information leaflet (hard copy and/or digital), which could also help publicise anatomical bequests and increase the supply of donors. This should set out the following:

- a. The procedures relating to registering bequests, acceptance criteria, the procedures to be followed after death (including under what circumstances a bequest might be declined), and the procedures relating to disposal of the human remains. Sufficient grounds for rejection could include, but need not be limited to:
    - the physical condition of the body
    - the virological or microbiological status of the donor in life
    - the existence of other diseases (for example neurological pathology) that might expose staff or students handling the body to unacceptable risks
    - body weight over a specified limit
    - the possible over-supply of donations at that institution at that time
    - place of death outside the designated area from which bodies are obtained.
  - b. The range of uses of donated bodies at that institution.
  - c. Possible costs, if any, that might be incurred by the bequestee's family in making a bequest, and the costs to be met by the institution accepting the bequest.
  - d. Whether the donor's anonymity will be preserved and whether their medical history accessed.
  - e. Whether the body or body parts might be supplied to another institution.
  - f. The maximum length of time the body will be retained, including any legally sanctioned possibility of indefinite retention of body parts. The relatives of the donor should be given the option of being informed in due course of the date when the remains will be disposed of.
  - g. Donors should be strongly encouraged to discuss their intentions with their relatives to ensure that their relatives are familiar with their wishes and that as far as possible those wishes will be carried out after death.
10. Special lectures/tutorials in ethics relating to the bequest of human remains should be made available to all students studying anatomy. This is to encourage the development of appropriate sensitivities in relation to the conduct and respect that is expected of those handling human remains used for purposes of anatomical education and research.
11. Institutions should be encouraged to hold Services of Thanksgiving or

Commemoration for those who have donated their bodies for medical education and research, to which can be invited relatives of the deceased, along with staff and students.