

Organ, Tissue and Whole Body Donation



A program of Community Hospice & Palliative Care
in collaboration with Northeast Florida hospitals

Every year thousands of people wait for organ transplants and thousands more receive treatment using tissue donations such as: corneas (the clear front covering of the eye), bone, heart valves, or tendons. Whole body donations play a critical role for educational institutions that have health care training programs. Making this decision a part of your advance care planning process is a way to inform your loved ones, health care surrogates, and health care providers about your wishes regarding organ, tissue and whole body donation.

What parts of my body can I donate?

A person can donate specific organs such as kidney, liver, lung, heart, or pancreas to be used if medically acceptable for transplantation. Different forms of eye-related anatomical gifts include cornea donation or whole-eye donations. Donors can also give permission for tissues to be harvested for use in medical treatment of others, such as tendons, heart valves, and bone. A person can also donate their brain and spinal cord for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's research.

What if my family members are opposed to donation?

This is why it is important to inform all family members, loved ones and your health care surrogate about your wishes as a part of your advance care planning process. After your death, a family member, guardian, or health care surrogate cannot modify, deny, or prevent your wish to make a donation.

How can I arrange to be an organ donor?

Because of the tremendous need for organ donors, a national resource has been established and each state has simplified ways for helping individuals become organ donors. At the Department of Health and Human Services website <http://organdonor.gov>, a person can find extensive information and can begin a process to sign-up as a donor online. In Florida, one can sign up at www.DonateLifeFlorida.org. Joining an authorized registry legally provides sufficient evidence of your informed consent to donate an anatomical gift.

In Florida, a person may also express a wish to donate:

- in a will
- in a living will or other advance directive
- on a driver's license
- by filling out a Uniform Donor Card or a written equivalent. These must be signed by two witnesses.

Can I have an open casket after donating my eyes or other organs?

An open casket funeral is possible for organ, eye and tissue donors. Organs are removed surgically with the same respect and dignity as in all surgical operations.

Is there a cost?

Some organizations provide all of their services at no cost. Others charge fees for embalming, transportation and other services. Please check the individual websites or specifically ask a representative about fees associated with donation.

Organ, Tissue and Whole Body Donation



Can I donate all or part of my body to be used after my death in medical or dental research, education or treatment?

Yes. A person can donate all or part of his or her body. This is called making an anatomical gift. Individuals under 18 years of age must have their parents or legal guardian give final approval in Florida.

How can I arrange to be a whole body donor?

A person indicates their informed consent to be a whole body donor using the same procedures previously listed for organ donation.

Many medical schools have Willed Body Programs. If you search on the internet using this term, you will find detailed information to help you in your planning. The Florida legislature has also established The Anatomical Board of the State of Florida (<http://anatbd.acb.med.ufl.edu/>) as a nonprofit state organization responsible for receiving, preparing (embalming), storing and distributing donations of human cadavers used in medical education programs throughout the state. Their website has detailed information for donors and for donors to share with their families. There also are private national organizations that will receive whole body donations and use them for medical education, research, and non-transplant tissue donation. An internet search using “whole body donation” can get a potential donor started in evaluating these options.

How long is my whole body used and what happens to my body afterwards?

The Anatomical Board of the State of Florida indicates that the educational use of the body can take up to two years. According to Florida law, after the studies are completed the bodies are cremated and can be returned to the family or a location selected for final internment. If no such request is made, the Anatomical Board takes responsibility for having the ashes spread over the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Specific arrangements can also be made with national donor organizations or medical schools for cremation and return of cremains for burial. Please ask about time frames with any organizations you are considering.

Where can I find more information on donation?

Anatomical Board of the State of Florida	1-800-628-2594	anatbd.acb.med.ufl.edu
Anatomy Gifts Registry	1-800-300-5433	anatomygifts.org
MedCure	1-866-560-2525	medcure.org
Science Care	1-800-417-3747	sciencecare.com

Remember to inform your doctors, family and loved ones about your wishes and decisions regarding organ, tissue, and whole body donation as part of your advance care planning. Doing so will make the decision-making process regarding your continued care less difficult for those acting on your behalf.