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## **A Discussion on Body Donation**

The American Association of Anatomists is the professional scientific association for faculty members, research professionals, and students in the anatomical sciences. Through our 130-year history we have supported the work of advancing anatomical science through research, education, and professional development.

Body donation is an integral part of medical education in the United States, with almost all medical and dental schools, and many other health profession or undergraduate institutions, using some form of body donation material in their teaching. A recent national survey of Anatomy Course Directors at U.S. medical schools showed that all 66 survey respondents used cadavers in the anatomy laboratories at their institutions (McBride, 2018).

The rules and regulations surrounding body donation are clear and regulated on a state-by-state basis. Each state has rules as they relate to the procurement and handling of donated bodies. Some states handle body donation through state anatomical boards or health departments, and other states allow direct donation to accredited medical schools. Medical schools have staff on site, including licensed funeral directors, to handle the storage, identification, handling, and final disposition of remains.

The American Association of Anatomists (AAA) does not set policy regarding body donation at any level, state or federal. We have created a [body donation policy](#) that highlights our recommendations around the ethical use of donated bodies.

As stated in this policy, all donations should conform to the [Uniform Anatomical Gift Act](#), which prohibits the sale or purchase of human body parts.

The use of donated bodies in biomedical science is a precious gift. AAA believes strongly in the legal and ethical use of donated bodies which help to teach the next generations of healthcare professionals, including future doctors, nurses, physical therapists, research scientists, and many others.

The unethical and criminal acts performed by some for-profit non-transplant tissue banks are concerning. These companies, which are different from the organ and tissue transplant industry, which the U.S. government regulates, can offer misleading information to individuals interested in donating their bodies to science, or in many cases to the families of the recently deceased. These organizations are sometimes referred to as “body-brokers” and may use bodies in illegal ways, such as through illegal storage or selling practices.

The AAA promotes the donation of bodies only to accredited universities and colleges or through a State Anatomical Program.

For more information on these programs, you can contact your State Health Department or Anatomical Board, or your local medical college or university. Information will be available online or by speaking to someone directly at these institutions. You should be given clear and reliable information about what will happen to you or your loved one’s body after death, what the options are for final disposition of the remains, and what, if any costs, will be associated with this process.

If you are still unclear, you may contact us for guidance at [info@anatomy.org](mailto:info@anatomy.org).

McBride, J. M. and Drake, R. L. (2018), National survey on anatomical sciences in medical education. *Anatomical Sciences Education*. [doi:10.1002/ase.1760](https://doi.org/10.1002/ase.1760)