

# UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA (USC) SCHOOL OF MEDICINE (SOM)

## GIFT OF BODY PROGRAM (GOB) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

### **When does my "Intent of Donation" start and is there a waiting period?**

There is a five (5) to seven (7) day waiting period from the date the completed forms are received in our GOB office to the time processing of the forms are completed. Once the application has been processed, potential donors will receive a letter with the wallet size donor intent card and a copy of the application for their records. ***At this stage, the potential donors are registered with the GOB Program.***

### **Death occurs, what happens next?**

If a donor passes away at the home, the first call should be to the hospice nurse (if applicable) or to the Coroner's Office of the county where death occurred. Once proper notification has been given, the hospice nurse or the coroner's office will contact the GOB Program to report the death and complete the intake questions with the GOB personnel or representative who will determine eligibility/acceptance.

If death occurs at a hospital or nursing facility, the staff will need to contact the GOB Program. Our GOB personnel will speak with the medical professional, asking them the intake questions, and the GOB personnel will determine eligibility/acceptance.

In either circumstance, once (if) eligibility/acceptance is established by the GOB personnel, transportation will then be arranged for the donor to arrive at the USC School of Medicine campus in Columbia, SC.

***\*Please note, registration with the program does not guarantee final acceptance. Final acceptance is only determined by a Gift of Body staff member at the time of death.\****

### **What happens if death occurs on the weekend, holiday, or outside of regular office hours?**

Regardless of the day or time, please call the Gift of Body Program at (803) 216-3888. If the office is closed, the message on the voicemail will relay instructions on how to proceed. If the caller has access to the wallet size donor intent card, one can follow the protocol listed.

### **What happens if death occurs while out of state or out of the country?**

If a donor passes away outside of the state of South Carolina and/or a considerable distance away from Columbia, SC, eligibility could be compromised. Within a certain distance outside of the state of South Carolina, it may be possible that the donor still be allowed acceptance into the program with the donor's family incurring the extended transportation cost. If transportation is not feasible due to distance or travel rules/regulations, we will assist the family by offering to locate similar programs closer to where death occurred or provide options for funeral home and crematories in their area. If a donor passes

overseas, unfortunately that donor will be denied acceptance into our GOB program. Although USC School of Medicine GOB Program wants to uphold the potential donor's wishes, with significant travel distance, we will need to adhere to state and federal laws regarding transportation. This may mean that the donor may be declined or may make it difficult and costly to the family for the donor to return to USC. **If this rare and unforeseen circumstance should pertain to a donor's situation, we ask that a member of the donor's family please contact our office after the donor passes so that we may update our records.**

### **Can I still be a donor if I spend part of each year in another state?**

Yes, and we encourage you to consider participating in a similar program close to where you stay when not in South Carolina. As difficult as it is to think about, it is best to have a contingency plan in the event that something should happen while being away from South Carolina.

### **What about my personal effects? How does my family get those back?**

At the time of death, we highly suggest any, and all, personal effects, such as but not limited to, jewelry, eyeglasses, blankets, etc... should be claimed by the family or healthcare worker prior to transport to the USC School of Medicine in Columbia, SC.

### **Can my family hold a viewing or visit to say goodbye once my body has been transferred to USC?**

Unfortunately, no. All viewing must take place prior to the donor being picked up by transportation. A delay in transportation may be feasible if someone is coming from nearby; however, circumstances vary, and it is best to speak with GOB program personnel if the need arises.

### **Will there be any expenses incurred to my family?**

There are (typically minimal) expenses incurred to the family. Expenses that **would/could** be incurred by the loved ones are 1) to the state (where death occurred) for certified death certificates, 2) a newspaper if the family chooses to submit an obituary, and 3) to a funeral home or church if the family chooses to hold an independent service.

Additional fees could apply if the registered donor passes outside of transportation limits, and it is agreed upon that the donor may still be accepted into the GOB program. In this circumstance, the family of the donor will be charged for the extended mileage until the donor is able to be picked up by the GOB personnel. If the accepted donor is located outside of the immediate service area, and it is agreed upon by the family that a third party, such as a funeral home of their choice, picks up and holds the accepted donor until the GOB personnel can arrive, the family will need to pay the funeral home for their transportation and hold charge.

Another charge that the family may incur is if the donor is denied acceptance. If a donor is denied acceptance, the services and charges will be addressed by the funeral home provided of the family's choice.

\*Outside area transportation charges **may** apply as mentioned above. \*

### **Are monetary donations accepted?**

Monetary donations for the GOB program, as well as donations made in memory of a loved one who donated to the GOB program are welcomed and appreciated but are not required.

### **Do we need to contact a funeral home?**

Contacting a funeral home is a personal choice.

The USC School of Medicine GOB Program acts as a funeral home in the way of taking the donor under our care from the moment of notification/acceptance and until cremation, the end of the study program. The GOB Program will file the death certificate and notify Social Security Administration (SSA) of the donor's passing. Our students host a public celebration of life (memorial service) that is held annually for all the donors who have entered the program during that calendar year. This event is typically in April.

We understand the importance of an independent service for a family's wish and need for traditions, in which case, we encourage contacting a funeral home or other entity to fulfill those needs. It is helpful to have a funeral home assist in planning a memorial service, especially if the cremated remains are being inurned in a cemetery at the end of the study period, or if the donor was a veteran and military honors are to be rendered. A person's home church, as well as the cemetery personnel, may be able to assist families as well when organizing a service and burial too.

If miscommunication occurs and a potential donor goes to a funeral home before the GOB Program is contacted, please have the funeral home contact the GOB Program as soon as possible, as delay could affect acceptance into the GOB program. It is always best for the funeral home to contact the GOB Program directly with any questions or concerns that they may have.

### **Is a funeral ceremony allowed before donation of my body?**

Yes and no. Yes, a family may elect to honor their loved one in the capacity that they best see fit. However, the body of the donor must be taken immediately to the USC School of Medicine in Columbia, SC and therefore will not be able to be present at the ceremony. It is recommended that the funeral home contact the Gift of Body Program as soon as possible so we can work together to meet the family's needs.

### **Is there an age requirement to be become a donor?**

Anyone 18 years of age or older can complete and submit a Gift of Body Donation and Registration Form Set. This form set (or packet) does not need to be notarized, but two witnesses are required.

## **Is there any chance that the GOB Program will not accept my body when I die?**

Unfortunately, yes. Certain circumstances/conditions may prevent acceptance into the Gift of Body Program. These conditions include but are not limited to:

- No prior arrangement of filing of completed paperwork with the GOB program
- Family objection or refusal
- Autopsy
- More than 72 hours post-mortem (even if kept in a cold room/morgue)
- Any embalming procedures begun or performed by personnel other than that of the GOB Program
- Specific types of sepsis
- Open wounds (minor bedsores excepted)
- Contagious diseases: HIV, VRE, Hepatitis C or B (at any time), any current Hepatitis, Tuberculosis, etc.
- Dementia from Creutzfeldt-Jakob (early onset/rapid death) form of Alzheimer's
- Any potential infection, which could present a hazard to faculty, staff, or students during study
- Post-mortem donated body parts other than eyes to other programs
- Any trauma to the body (i.e., accident, murder, suicide, etc.)
- Any recent (72 hour) radiation, isotope tracing, radioactive angiogram or radioactive iodine
- Any radioactive implant for cancer treatment
- Medical obesity or emaciation
- Limb amputation

## **If I am denied, what happens next?**

The percentage of refusals is minimal, but the refusal policies are necessary for the safety of our students and staff and the integrity of the program. ***Families should be prepared to make other arrangements should any of the above conditions be present at the time of the donor's passing or if the donor is denied acceptance.***

## **Am I able to donate my organs and still participate in the Gift of Body Program?**

The only post-mortem (after death) donation allowed in conjunction with the Gift of Body program is an eye donation. If the donor wishes to follow this intent, those arrangements must be made in advance with a local hospital or clinic for the procurement of eyes once death has occurred. These arrangements, and any costs incurred, are the responsibility of the donor and/or the donor's family. These procedures must be completed prior to transport to the USC School of Medicine in Columbia, SC as we are unable to perform this procedure.

## **Will my family get a report about what caused my death?**

A cause of death, provided by the certifying physician or county coroner, will be listed on the state certified death certificate. An extensive report will not be provided as autopsies are not performed on donors. Please keep in mind, the students are *learning* and are not qualified to determine a cause of death or provide in depth information as to what the cause may have been.

## **Will my body be utilized to research diseases and disorders?**

The primary focus is for students is to learn and understand the fundamentals of clinical human anatomy and build their knowledge on a solid understanding and foundation. As areas of studies become more involved, students will learn how diseases and disorders affect the human body and will be able to learn how to detect anomalies.

## **How long is the study period?**

The study period is one (1) to no more than four (4) years and depends on the study assignment. At the end of the study period, each donor will be cremated and returned to the GOB Program at the USC School of Medicine campus in Columbia, SC. Families will be notified when the study periods end, and if applicable, arrangements will be made for cremated remains to be returned to the family. Otherwise, the GOB Program will inter the cremains.

## **Who and when decides if cremated remains are to be returned to my family?**

At the time of application, the donor, or if their Power of Attorney completed the application on their behalf, has the opportunity to declare who is to receive the cremated remains and make the request to the GOB Program while the donor is still living. Updates to the declaration can be made only by the donor or the listed Power of Attorney up until death occurs. Requests for return cannot be made once death has occurred.

If the donor has elected to participate in the Polymer Preservation Program, cremated remains will not be returned to the family, and inurnment will be the responsibility of the USC School of Medicine. Please refer to the Polymer (permanent) Preservation Program attachment for more information.

## **Can my family change my donation intent against my will?**

Technically, no. However, it can happen. Even though the donor intent form is a legal document, since it is not registered like a Final Will and Testament, no one other than the Next of Kin or Personal Representative ensures that a donor's last wishes are being carried out.

We strongly suggest having a discussion with your family and close friends to ease your apprehension of whether or not your donor intent will be carried out. Conversations of this nature are difficult to think about and vocalize with the people we care about. However, having these discussions can be beneficial, especially when the time comes and decisions need to be made. Being prepared on paper allows families and friends to focus and rely on each other during such a difficult and overwhelming time.

## **What if my family and I are estranged, or I want to donate no matter what they say?**

If family dynamics are complex, it is suggested to have a neutral party in place to handle your affairs when the time comes. If no one is in place, the legal responsibility falls to your Next of Kin (NOK), which follows in the order of spouse, children, parents (if living), siblings, aunts/uncles, cousins.

At the end of the study period, after cremation has taken place, the cremains will be released to the NOK, **unless** the donor intent lists a specific individual, or has signed up for the Polymer Preservation Program.

If the designated person fails to claim the cremains after 90 days, the School of Medicine will assume responsibility and inter the cremains. Please note, once the cremains have been interred, they cannot be removed and returned to the family.

The donor at any time can update their records with us in the GOB Program and can also update or change their personal representative or POA. In doing so, this will help ensure that your cremains are returned to your designated person. We strongly encourage all registered donors to update our GOB Program anytime there is a change, especially regarding their NOK, POA, or personal representative.

**Is the USC School of Medicine Gift of Body Program in Columbia, SC the same as the MUSC Willed Body Program in Charleston, SC or the USC School of Medicine Greenville in Greenville, SC?**

No. Each program is a respectable division of each educational institute. Since each program is run independently and in accordance with the particular needs of that institution established by their administration and program sponsors, the qualifying criteria and set of rules/regulations may differ. It is best to look into all three programs before deciding which one meets your needs and level of comfort.

There are similarities between all three, however, there are differences too. It is best to research and ask questions. Never assume that all anatomical programs are the same.

**Will my family receive financial compensation or an income tax deduction if I become a donor?**

No. Families will not receive financial compensation for those donating to the GOB Program. Furthermore, there is not an income tax deduction/exemption for participating in a body donation program or for paid funeral expenses.

**What if I have further questions?**

Any additional questions or concerns can be addressed by the program manager and support staff by calling (803) 216-3888, Monday through Friday, 8:30am to 5:00pm, or by emailing us at [RealAnatomy@uscmed.sc.edu](mailto:RealAnatomy@uscmed.sc.edu).