Frequently Asked Questions

What are the uses of an anatomical gift at the University of Vermont?

- The UVM Anatomical Gift Program is a whole-body donation program that allows students, health care professionals and clinical specialists at the University of Vermont and The University of Vermont Medical Center to study the structure of the human body, conduct anatomical reviews and develop new clinical procedures.
- The majority of donations are studied during the College of Medicine’s anatomy and neuroscience courses for first year medical and Physical Therapy students. Some donors and anatomical specimens are utilized in advanced anatomy courses for medical students and resident/clinical training, as well as certain undergraduate courses and special workshops. Although our donors are not utilized for research as most people envision, there are some anatomical studies and procedures that our donors may contribute toward, such as development of an artificial joint or improvement of a surgical procedure.

Who can donate?

- The Uniform Anatomical Gift Act, adopted by the Vermont State Legislature in 1970, permits people at least 18 years of age or older to legally donate their remains to medical institutions for the advancement of medical science. The University of Vermont registration materials are to be completed in the presence of 2 witnesses and then submitted to this department to finalize the registration.
- Although pre-registration by the donor is strongly encouraged, bequests by the Next of Kin or other authorized agent are allowed.
- There is no upper age limit for registration or donation to the Anatomical Gift Program.

How can I Enroll in the Anatomical Gift Program at the University of Vermont?

- Registration forms will be sent upon request during regular business hours. Those wishing to register as a whole-body donor should telephone (802) 656-4605 or email agp@med.uvm.edu to request registration materials. Paperwork should be completed and on file in our office to facilitate acceptance of a donation. We advise prospective donors to discuss their decision with appropriate family members/executors and provide them with copies of the donation-related paperwork.

Can I change my mind once I have registered with the Anatomical Gift Program?

- Yes. You can withdraw from the program at any time by notifying our office in writing (a signature and date are required). It is recommended that you share this decision with family or others who may have been involved with your initial registration.
Can I donate my body to the Anatomical Gift Program and also be an organ donor?

- No, with the exception of eye donation. In general, being an organ donor precludes one from making an anatomical gift for medical education. Eye donation is compatible with body donation, but must be completed prior to the donor’s arrival at UVM after the time of death.
- People are certainly welcome to register with UVM’s Anatomical Gift Program, even though they may have registered as well with an organ donation program. That way, should the donor be ineligible for organ donation at the time of death, whole-body donation to our Program is still a possibility.

How long will my body remain at the University of Vermont?

- In general, donations remain at the University of Vermont for a period of 2-3 years. A donor may choose to allow the University to extend studies for a longer period of time, as indicated in the Special Use Form of our registration and update packets.

What will become of the remains after studies are complete?

- After studies have been completed, the cremated remains (ashes) will be returned to the designated Recipient for final disposition.
- Designation of the Primary Recipient and an Alternate Recipient is made at the time of registration but information may be changed later by contacting our office and updating the paperwork. We ask for an alternate recipient to be named in case the primary is unavailable as the time of cremation approaches. A number of our studies conclude at times of the year that many people are away on holiday, so providing an alternate contact is highly advised.
- In addition to regular studies, there are special studies and uses that the donor may grant permission for. These include retention of the donor’s body or specimens/preparations beyond the usual 2-3 year period and use of the donor or donor materials outside of the University of Vermont and the University of Vermont Medical Center. There is a form in the registration and update packets that allows permission to be granted or denied for each use.

Does being registered with the Anatomical Gift Program mean that I will automatically be accepted when I die?

- Regretfully no, though most donors registered in our whole-body donation program can be accepted. There is often concern that having had organs removed due to previous surgical procedures will prohibit an individual from becoming a donor, but this is rarely the case. The University of Vermont College of Medicine reserves the right to decline any donation. The most common reasons that donation may be declined include (but are not limited to):
  - An autopsy or recent surgery has been performed.
  - Organs (with the exception of eyes) have been removed after death.
  - There has been severe physical trauma or multiple amputations.
  - The donor has a serious transmittable disease, including (but not limited to): HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, meningitis, tuberculosis, or antibiotic-resistant microorganisms.
  - Sepsis/infection is present and the microorganism has not been identified nor tested for antibiotic resistance.
• The donor is extremely obese or severely emaciated.
• More than 48-60 hours will have elapsed from time of death to arrival at our facility.
• The University is officially closed (such as for holidays and storm closures), or our staff/facilities are unavailable.
• Our facility is full.
• We strongly encourage every donor to discuss the details of this bequest with those who may be involved and to provide them with copies of our information letter, as well as written instructions pertaining to their arrangements.
• In rare instances, a received donation will be deemed unsuitable for adequate anatomical preservation or study. Factors contributing to such could include the presence of decayed tissue, open or recent wounds, an abundance of fatty tissue, or extensive deformities. In such cases the University will arrange for cremation as soon as possible, with the cremated remains (ashes) being returned to the designated Recipient.

What is the cost of making an anatomical gift donation?

• The UVM College of Medicine pays for services directly related to received donations, in accordance with policy current at the time of the donor's arrival. At this time, for donors whose deaths have occurred within the State of Vermont or within a few miles of its borders, UVM pays $400 for removal and paperwork (including the Burial Transfer Permit), plus $2 per loaded mile for transportation to the University. For all other received donations, the College will only pay for mileage from the Vermont State border to our facility. Any additional fees charged by the transporting funeral home or cremation service are the responsibility of the donor's estate or Next of Kin/agent. UVM assumes no responsibility for donors transported to the University without prior authorization by our staff nor those whose bequests have been declined. Although transportation costs as noted will be the responsibility of the College of Medicine, all arrangements are the responsibility of the donor or his/her designee.
• The University assumes all responsibility for cremation of the remains following completion of the studies and return of the ashes to a designated recipient.

Does a funeral home have to be involved? Who chooses one?

• Yes, a funeral home or cremation service is required to handle the transportation process, which will include removal of your body from the place of death and, if necessary, holding your remains at their facility until the necessary paperwork has been completed. The funeral or cremation service director will work with the certifying physician, as well as your family or agent, to generate the Death Certificate and will furnish our staff with the information needed to determine acceptability of the donation. Should we be able to receive your donation, the funeral home or cremation service staff will set up a time with our staff to bring your body to UVM. If we must decline acceptance, the director will notify your next of kin/agent and proceed with the backup plan that you or your family/agent has arranged for.
• You or your family/agent are responsible for choosing and setting up arrangements with the funeral home or cremation service to facilitate the process. Many donors prefer to set up prearrangements themselves, not only for the transportation to UVM, but for the backup plan should acceptance be declined. This insures that their plans are in order and that there will be less confusion at the time of death. There is included at the end of each UVM Anatomical Gift Program registration and update packet a reference sheet which can be passed along to the transporter. As information may change over time, we suggest that the donor – or donor’s
executor/agent – keep files updated with both the Anatomical Gift Program office and the agency that has been selected to handle the transportation.

- We reimburse directly the funeral home or cremation service for services (as described above) for accepted/received donors. Should we decline acceptance of a donation, no costs shall be covered by the University. We determine acceptability of the donation before the transportation to UVM takes place.

What will happen at the time of death?

- Before bringing a body to UVM, the funeral home or cremation service that will be handling the transportation is to telephone (802) 656-4605. Our staff will review the information listed on the Death Certificate or medical Preliminary Report of Death (PROD) in order to determine whether or not the donation can be accepted. We urge all of our donors to have a backup plan in place in the event that we must regretfully decline a donation.

If accepted, our staff will set up a time with the funeral home or cremation service representative to receive the body at UVM.

- Funeral directors may or may not be aware of the current policies and procedures regarding the Anatomical Gift Program, so it is suggested that any questions regarding our Program be directed to our staff at (802) 656-4605. We are more than happy to answer any questions.

What happens if I am outside of Vermont at the time of death?

- A donor must be transported to our facility within 48-60 hours from the time of death. Should this not be possible, we regretfully must decline the donation. For accepted donors that have died outside of Vermont, the College assumes costs according to the current fee structure. At this time, we pay the transporting funeral home $2 per loaded mile from the Vermont border to our facility.
- If you frequently travel to or live in another region for part of the year, we strongly encourage you to also register with Anatomical Gift Programs in that region.

Will UVM provide my family with a report on findings during the studies?

- No. The faculty and students involved in the studies are not qualified to provide a report on findings during our studies, which are not conducted as an autopsy would be. No donor material will be available for testing or an autopsy after our studies have concluded. Donors or their family members who have medical concerns and may wish to arrange for an autopsy or testing - rather than donation to our Program – should contact a local hospital (Pathology or the morgue) or medical examiner’s office for further information.
- Should the decision be made to rescind the donation and have an autopsy (or testing) done, please notify our office so that we may update our records.
What happens when studies are complete? Can my family members contact UVM to check on the status of studies?

- Shortly before completion of the anatomical studies, the designated primary Recipient (or alternate, if need be) will be contacted to verify the instructions for return of the cremated remains (ashes). For our regular studies, it will likely be 2-3 years from the time of the donor's arrival at our facility before the studies are completed. If extended special uses have been authorized, it may be longer. Please inform the designated recipient(s) and any other concerned parties of this.
- Family members can feel free to contact the Anatomical Gift Program if they would like information on when studies will likely be complete, but should be made aware that it will likely be at least 2 years from the time of the donor’s arrival at UVM.

Who is invited to the donor Memorial Ceremony and when is it held?

- A yearly memorial ceremony, called the Convocation of Thanks, is held to honor those donors whose gifs have contributed to studies over the past academic year and whose studies are concluding. Family members and close significant others are invited to attend this final tribute. Our studies generally run 2 years or more, so please let your loved ones know that it will be some time before the invitations arrive. They are certainly welcome to contact us with any questions or concerns that they may have. The Convocation of Thanks has traditionally been conducted in the springtime, with invitations being sent out in February or March.
- As a donor, you have the opportunity to pass along a message to the students and other attendees at the memorial ceremony. Included in the registration and update packets is a form that allows you to share information, should you choose to do so. Comments from the donors and their loved ones are sincerely appreciated. These comments – and a photo should you care to provide one – are truly the highlights of the memorial ceremony and are greatly anticipated.