

EDITORIAL

We are “Body Donors” not Cadavers

Geoffrey D Guttmann*

Guttmann GD. We are “Body Donors” not Cadavers. Int J Cadaver Stud Ant Var. 2024;5(2):79-81.

Key Words: *Skull; Cranial sutures; Cranial fontanelles; Joints*

On September 16, 2024, NBC National news reported on the usage of unclaimed bodies by the University of North Texas Health Science (UNTHSC) Center for Anatomical Sciences in Fort Worth, Texas. This Center has Gross Anatomy Laboratories and a BioSkills Lab for Gross Anatomy projects related to the Anatomical Sciences and Continuing Education Programs. Around 2016, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner’s Office was looking for a path in disposing “unclaimed dead bodies”, i.e. mainly the homeless for whom the office could not find the next of kin. UNTHSC looked at this “opportunity” as a way to pay for the operation of Gross Anatomy and BioSkills Labs and for preserving the donor bodies that had been agreed upon for education and research purposes. In 2018, the Tarrant County Commissioners agreed to the contract. Dallas County Medical Examiner’s Office soon followed the same route as Tarrant County [1].

So, what went WRONG? First, the body donors were treated as cadavers upon being preserved and/or entering the Willed Body Program. Using the term “cadaver” is a “commodification” of the body donor. What is “commodification”? Commodification is the act of turning something into an item or commodity

that can be bought and sold [2]. A synonym for commodification is commercialization [3]. An example of commodification is putting a “price tag” on a body part and shipping it elsewhere for educational, research, or experimental use. This is a degrading and pejorative action for the treatment of the body donor. Thus, it is inherent upon each of us to make sure that each body donor that comes to our Willed Body Program is treated with respect, honour, and gratitude for a selfless donation for faculty and students to learn from and for research to help humanity. Second, the UNTHSC Center for Anatomical Sciences Willed Body Program should NEVER have taken unclaimed dead bodies. The Texas Funeral Services Commission does not allow Willed Body Programs to use “unclaimed bodies” for teaching and research or for any other activity related to the Health Professions Education Programs. A big failing occurred because the people investigating the death related to the unclaimed body did not make an exhaustive search effort to ensure there were no next of kin related to the dead person and thus obtain permission to have the donor body placed in a Willed Body Program. Third, UNTHSC Willed Body Program plans for the final disposition of the body donor involved

Professor of Anatomy (Retired), Texas Tech University Health Science Center, El Paso, Texas, USA

**Corresponding author: Geoffrey D Guttmann, Professor of Anatomy (Retired), Texas Tech University Health Science Center, El Paso, Texas, USA, Email: gdgu77mann@gmail.com*

Received: December 09, 2024, Accepted: December 14, 2024, Published: December 23, 2024



This open-access article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (CC BY-NC) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits reuse, distribution and reproduction of the article, provided that the original work is properly cited and the reuse is restricted to noncommercial purposes.

alkaline hydrolysis, where the body donor is turned into liquid with a little bone left as an “ash” for final disposal [1]. Every body donor needs to be treated with respect to ensure that they have given permission for their use in the Willed Body Program and that the final disposition of the body donor is within legal bounds and in accordance with their last wishes.

So, what can one do to ensure the body donor is treated with respect, honour, and gratitude? The American Association for Anatomy has a very useful webpage, **Promoting Respect for Human Body Donors in Anatomy Laboratories**, that has been put together by Anna Ricci, Ph.D [4].

For this editorial, I will include some very salient points, First, use the appropriate, respectful, and honourable terminology. Call the dead body that has been received by the Willed Body Program, a “body donor”. It is a donation from the person who just died that has made this gift important to faculty and students. Avoid using the term, “skin” or “skinning”, and use “remove the skin”. Avoid using the term “fat”, instead use “adipose tissue”. Second, celebrate anatomical variation. Use anatomical variations as an opportunity to teach the variations or differences that occur in each of us, humans. Third, in any learning environment, we sometimes come across some distasteful tasks, such as removing excess adipose tissue. Please make sure that students and/or faculty fulfill this responsibility and respect the body donor for the experience they may gain. Fourth, put on a convocation of thanks or service to acknowledge and show gratitude for the gift of the body donor to further your education and research [4,5].

Lastly, this journal, International Journal of Cadaveric Studies and Anatomical Variations should be renamed International Journal of Body Donor Studies and Anatomical Variations.

Body Donor Studies can be explored by evaluating how people decide to donate their bodies to Willed Body Programs. Examples of how Willed Body Programs can discuss the importance of population characteristics in representing patients in clinical practice or how the families of body donors feel about the body donation.

Show the anatomy community of faculty, students, and staff how important body donation is to our profession and treat the body donors with respect and gratitude.

Summary

Aim: Use appropriate terminology or language in describing the gift of body donation. Use Body donor, body, or donor and NOT cadaver

Important points: 1. Stating a body donor, body, or donor is a cadaver degrades and commodifies the humane aspect of this gift. Body donors are NOT cadavers.

2. Never accept “unclaimed bodies” into the Willed Body Program of your institution. These bodies deserve better treatment in their final disposition.

3. Do your best efforts within legal bounds to honour the final request of the body donor.

Conclusion: Treat the body donor the same way you would want your passed loved one to be treated, with respect, gratitude, and honor.

Recommendation

Change the name of this journal from International Journal of Cadaveric Studies and Anatomical Variations to International Journal of Body Donor Studies and Anatomical Variations. Using proper and caring terminology, Body Donors, body, or donors are NOT cadavers!

References

1. Dealing The Dead. <https://www.nbcnews.com/dealing-the-dead> (accessed December 2024).
2. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/commodification>
3. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/commodified> (accessed December 7, 2024).
4. Ricci A. https://www.anatomy.org/ANATOMY/ANATOMY/News-Journals/Blog/Promoting-Respect.aspx?utm_medium=email&utm_source=rasa_io&utm_campaign=newsletter. (accessed December 7, 2024).
5. Strkalj G. Bodies in the anatomy laboratory: a note on terminology. *Anat Sci Educ.* 2024;17:1358-60.