



# Cadaver Donation: Effective Strategies and Programs

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## Abstract

**Background:** An in-depth knowledge of human anatomy forms the foundation of medical education. Utilizing cadavers for dissection remains a pivotal approach for instructing the medical students in anatomical studies. The shortage of cadavers in medical universities worldwide poses a significant challenge for education and research in medical sciences. Considering that cadavers serve as the initial patients for medical students and are vital for fostering ethical principles and enhancing collaborative and scientific skills among students, addressing this shortage is crucial. Thus, implementing initiatives that promote body donation within the community can significantly benefit medical education.

**Methods:** In this study, keywords were selected and reviewed in reputable databases such as PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar from the year 2000 to 2024. A total of 100 articles were extracted, and after reviewing the abstracts, 23 articles were selected for the final analysis and used to summarize the results.

**Results:** This article outlines multiple strategies to promote body donation. These include emphasizing hospital-based donation programs, educational campaigns, creating websites, apps, and establishing local centers for donor registration and information. It also highlights the creation of memorials to honor donors and supportive programs like covering burial costs. Removing legal barriers, collaborating with religious organizations to address cultural concerns and holding memorial ceremonies are also crucial. Ensuring legal and ethical standards in the use of cadavers is emphasized as well.

**Conclusion:** These strategies can significantly enhance community participation in body donation, thereby improving practical dissection education and elevating the quality of medical education.

**Keywords:** Anatomy education, Body donation program, Body donation regulations, Cadaver, Community participation, Education, Ethics in body donation, Medical, Memorial ceremonies

## Introduction

Donating one's body at the time of death to medical schools represents a valuable program for the education of young doctors, dentists, nurses, and other allied health professionals. It also promotes the development of surgical and research techniques. The use of cadavers in anatomy and medical education is of significant importance. The availability of cadavers helps students learn the structures of the human body in its natural form, enhance their practical skills in a controlled environment, practice surgical techniques, and learn ethical principles and respect for the human body. Additionally, advancements in surgical protocols and performing microsurgery in sensitive medical fields such as ophthalmology, orthopedics, cardiovascular surgery, urology, otolaryngology, and neurosurgery have increased the need for dissection and the enhancement of skills for microscopic surgeries more than ever before (1,2). The shortage of cadavers for medical education is a global issue that has significantly impacted the quality of training for medical students. This shortage is prevalent in several regions of the world, including Iran. With the increasing number of medical students worldwide, the demand for cadavers has grown even more critical (3,4). Certainly, some individuals advocate for the use of alternative methods instead of cadavers, considering the advances in technology. However, these alternative methods have drawbacks: lack of realism, inadequate practical skill development, especially in surgical techniques necessary for the precision and execution of surgical procedures, and the inability to effectively convey ethical considerations to medical students (5-8). In conclusion, strategies that encourage body donation within the community are essential. This article aims to provide a detailed explanation of effective measures for promoting body donation.

## Materials and Methods

In this study, the keywords "body donation program", "memorial ceremonies", "anatomy education", "body donation regulations", "ethics in body donation", and "religion and culture in body donation" were reviewed in reputable scientific databases such as PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar from 2000 to 2024. A total of 100 articles

on the aforementioned topics were extracted. After reviewing the abstracts, approximately 23 articles were selected for final analysis, and their data were utilized in this study.

## Discussion

### **Body donation program**

Many countries have well-established body donation programs. In contrast, there are countries without such programs that instead rely on unidentified bodies or occasionally a few donated cadavers (9). Body donation programs should be supported by governments, educational institutions, and charitable organizations. These entities require operational managers to implement programs, financial staff to manage budgets, specialized advisors to guide donors, content and communication staff to produce and exchange information, information security personnel to protect data, and service staff to provide services. As a result, such organizations need support from relevant institutions. Additionally, within the structure of body donation programs, all necessary documents from donors must be submitted to the "Ethics Committee" for review. An informed consent form for body donation for educational and research purposes is mandatory. The will for organ and body remains donation, which must be notarized, and the informed consent form legally ensures that the donor is clearly informed about the donation and the conditions of body use not only for education but also for research. Creating a website and providing information and relevant donation forms, along with a contact number and email to answer donor questions, can be effective. After a donor registers, a donation card should be issued to them, and their family should be informed to notify the university upon the donor's death. At the Federal University of Health Sciences of Porto Alegre in Brazil, implementing a body donation program successfully increased the number of donors from 26 individuals between 2003 and 2007 to 147 individuals between 2008 and 2012 (10). The success of these programs has been confirmed in various countries, including New Zealand, Africa, Ireland, Korea, Europe, and the United States (11-14).

### **Memorials**

Holding memorial ceremonies can help recognize the

role of donors within the community. Additionally, other forms of appreciation can encourage donations. This recognition honors the generosity of donors and raises community awareness about the impact of these contribution (9,15,16). Other forms of appreciation can include creating gravestones, statues, plaques, metal or wooden signs, and planting memorial trees. Additionally, a designated area in the cemetery can be allocated for the burial of donors. This section would be distinguishable from the rest of the cemetery by unique names and specific elements.

### **Educational campaigns**

Educational campaigns should be conducted to raise community awareness about the importance of body donation. These campaigns can include informational sessions, brochures, and online resources to educate the public about the benefits and process of donation. Posters can be placed in all hospitals with the message, "Have you considered donating your body to advance science after death?" and providing contact information so potential donors can connect with the program and have their questions answered (10). Additionally, the university website can provide comprehensive information about the importance and process of body donation. Contact information and an email address should also be available on the site to answer visitors' questions.

### **Incentive programs**

In incentive programs, donors can be offered benefits such as covering burial costs. These aids aim to reduce the financial burden on families and encourage more individuals to donate their bodies (17). To identify donors, donor cards can be issued, granting these individuals access to university facilities and benefits provided by supporting organizations during their lifetime.

### **Body donation regulations**

The first laws regarding the dissection of human bodies were enacted in 1832 in England and in 1854 in New York. These laws permitted the use of unidentified bodies instead of the bodies of executed individuals (18). Today, laws in some countries allow the use of unidentified bodies without legal complications. These regulations facilitate the use of

such bodies for educational and research purposes, ensuring that institutions can continue their work without interruption while maintaining ethical standards (19). It is ethically problematic due to the lack of informed consent. Ensuring informed consent is a fundamental ethical principle (20). In 1968, the United States enacted legislation that serves as a legal framework for body donors. This foundational legal structure supports and regulates the process of body donation in the United States (21). It is recommended today that informed consent be obtained in writing before a will is created. Additionally, the new guidelines clearly explain to the donor the aspects of using the body for research or educational purposes, the duration of cadaver preservation, the possibility of transferring the body out of the province, and the use of images. These aspects are only utilized with the donor's written consent (22). It is also recommended that committees within the university oversee the adherence to legal and ethical standards. These committees play a crucial role in ensuring that body donation programs are conducted with respect for both the donors and the ethical guidelines established by the institution.

### **Involvement of religious and cultural organizations**

Religious and cultural beliefs significantly influence an individual's willingness to donate their body to science (23). Collaborating with religious leaders and organizations can help address cultural and religious concerns regarding body donation. These partnerships often include discussions and educational sessions to align donation practices with the religious beliefs of the community. Clergy and intellectuals can speak about body donation in religious gatherings, explain its significance, and highlight its benefits. This approach can lead to greater understanding and acceptance among the public.

### **Hospital-based programs**

In hospitals, teams are established to identify potential body donors and support their families through body donation programs. These teams work closely with organ transplant coordinators to ensure that assistance is provided respectfully and effectively. The objective of these programs is to increase the number of body

donors, thereby enhancing access to organs and tissues for medical education and research (4).

## Conclusion

Given the necessity of cadavers for teaching scientific principles, ethical values, and practical skills to medical students, as well as for performing advanced surgical techniques, and considering the global shortage of cadavers, this article aims to outline effective strategies for promoting body donation. These strategies include establishing body donation programs, adhering to ethical principles, facilitating legal processes, implementing hospital-based donation programs, running community awareness campaigns, engaging religious organizations, holding memorials, and providing financial support to donors.

Adhering to these measures can increase body donations, thereby directly enhancing the education of medical students.

## Acknowledgement

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who, with their unparalleled dedication and humanity, have donated their bodies for the advancement of science and research worldwide, making significant contributions to medical education. These noble donors and their families deserve our highest respect and deepest appreciation.

## Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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