**NHS Education for Scotland**

**Transcript of ‘Body Donation In Scotland: Understanding What Happens After a Person Dies’ Animation**

When someone wishes to donate their whole body to medical science at a Scottish university, it’s important to know what needs to happen when they die. This will help increase the opportunity that their donation would be accepted.

There’s no upper age limit, but to be considered, a person must have formally recorded in writing their wish to be a body donor themselves. Ideally, you’ll know before they die if someone wishes to donate their body – they might have discussed it with you. This can allow time to ensure the appropriate paperwork and contact numbers are accessible and can mean the process runs more smoothly when the person dies. But you might only find out about their intention later.

Body donation is time sensitive. You need to establish as soon as possible after death whether someone wanted to donate their body and if they had completed the necessary registration paperwork. A Declaration of Bequest or Bequest Form might have been completed but not returned to the university. A person’s next of kin or their solicitor may hold a copy with their will; their wish to donate may also be on their medical record. It’s important to communicate sensitively and effectively with families. Most will be aware of their relative’s wishes, but not everyone will have chosen to discuss it.

Five universities in Scotland accept body donations. Each has an Anatomy Bequest Coordinator who works with staff and families to facilitate the process. Bequest Coordinators will seek to establish that a person’s next of kin are in agreement – and guide them through the necessary paperwork. A body can only be donated with the agreement of the next of kin. They can also help facilitate conversations and provide support if anyone has questions or concerns about donation.

People can be considered for organ, tissue and body donation. Unfortunately, it isn’t possible to donate organs or tissues for transplantation and then have your body donated for medical science. There may be an exception for the donation of corneas in some circumstances. Where a person is eligible for both, organ donation will normally take precedence.

Universities need to receive a donor’s body within three days of death, but some will accept up to five. Any delay could jeopardise the donation and cause additional distress to relatives and friends who are bereaved. Universities are not automatically informed of a registered donor’s death so the Bequest Coordinator must be contacted as soon as possible. It’s important to establish who will do this so it’s not overlooked – this could be done by the person’s family or a member of staff. Telephone contact details can be found on the Scottish Government website and also those of universities who handle donation. If you don’t know which university a donor has registered with, the nearest will be able to put you in touch with the correct Bequest Coordinator.

Each university requires certain information to consider a donor’s suitability. The Bequest Coordinator will need to speak to a member of the clinical team with access to and familiarity with the donor’s notes as soon after their death as possible. It’s preferable for this to be the certifying doctor. In hospital it doesn’t have to be a consultant. They will be asked about the cause of death, the donor’s physical condition, height and weight, and a brief medical history. Clinical staff may be concerned about confidentiality, but it’s permissible to share this information with a university to facilitate body donation.

Some staff may think a donor’s body won’t be accepted, perhaps based on previous experience or unfamiliarity with the process. But decisions are made on a case-by-case basis and the Bequest Coordinator should always be contacted.

Until a decision on acceptance has been made and transport arranged, care of the deceased and family visits can take place as normal. It’s important that the person’s body is transferred to refrigerated facilities as soon as possible and preferably within eight hours of death. The Medical Certificate of Cause of Death should be completed by the certifying doctor and processed in the normal way, or the death should be reported to the Procurator Fiscal, if required.

Unfortunately, not everybody registered will be accepted for donation when they die. Delays, logistics, medical details or family disagreements can all prevent a donation going ahead. If a donation is declined, this can have a significant impact on families who are grieving. It could also have practical implications as they will need to make funeral arrangements which they might not have been anticipating.

Universities always treat people who have donated their body with dignity, respect and professionalism. They are often referred to as ‘silent teachers’, reflecting their contribution to medical education to enhance the training of the next generation of healthcare staff, researchers and scientists.

Health and social care staff can play a key role in supporting body donation through effective and timely communication with colleagues and families, and by undertaking the practical tasks required following a person’s death efficiently and effectively. They can help ensure that, wherever possible, donors’ wishes are respected, families who are bereaved are supported, and the educational, training and research benefits of the body donation programme continue.

The film was produced in July 2023 and can be found at [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/) or <https://vimeo.com/844316947>

For more information visit [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/) or contact [SupportAroundDeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:SupportAroundDeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk)

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