

Frequently Asked Questions

Why should I consider an anatomical bequeathal?

The study of medicine would not be possible without the aid of those conscientious persons who donate their bodies toward the advancement of medical science. Countless individuals enjoy fullness of health in part through their practicing physician's diligent anatomical study. The well-trained physicians graduated from Weill Cornell Medicine are always mindful and grateful for this gift and acknowledge lasting indebtedness to the anonymous donors.

How may I leave my body to the Joan and Sanford I. Weill Medical College?

At your request, legal forms to authorize an anatomical gift will be sent to you in duplicate. One is to be returned to Weill Cornell Medicine and the other is to be retained among the donor's important papers. A wallet card, which is a legal document under the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act, will be provided for you to carry.

Who may make an anatomical donation?

To make a legal anatomical donation of his or her own body, a person must have reached their eighteenth birthday. In addition, the next of kin or executor of estate or a friend of a recently deceased person may donate the remains as an anatomical gift.

Could a bequest be made as a codicil to a will?

Yes. Consult an attorney for details. However, to expedite the donation, it is recommended that bequeathal forms also be filed with the Anatomy Division at Weill Cornell Medicine.

Will any payment be received for the body?

No. Payment for a body is illegal. However, Weill Cornell Medicine can undertake the final disposition of a body with no expense to the family or estate.

Does age, disease, amputation, or prior surgery make the donation unacceptable?

As a general rule and within a broad range of pathology, most bodies may be used for medical study. The right is reserved to decline donation for certain virulent disease conditions.

What about autopsies?

Autopsies are of interest to the pathologist and attending clinician. In certain instances, autopsy may be necessary or required by state law. A body that has been autopsied must be declined for anatomical study.

May a body be embalmed before donation?

No. Due to the particular requirements of the medical studies, very special formulas and procedures are used by our staff mortician to ensure lasting and useful preservation of the body. A body, which has been embalmed commercially prior to delivery to the medical school, must be declined as unsuitable for anatomical study.

Can organs be donated to the organ banks and the body donated for medical study?

No. Bodies from which organs have been removed must be declined as unsuitable for anatomical study.

Can corneas be donated to the eye and the body donated for medical science?

Yes, there is no conflict. However, arrangements would need to be made with an eye bank as well. Corneas must be removed immediately following death.

Eye Bank for Sight Restoration
(212) 742-9000 or (212) 968-1075

Weill Cornell Medicine
Department of Radiology
525 East 68th Street
New York, NY 10065
Phone: (212) 746-6000



Contact Us



Directory

If a bequest is made to Weill Cornell Medicine and the donor dies outside of the greater New York area, what is the procedure?

There are two alternatives: 1) the family can have the un-embalmed body transported to Weill Cornell Medicine, at the expense of the family or estate, or 2) the family may donate the remains to a medical school within the region in which death occurred.

How long will the studies usually take?

Anatomical studies are detailed and intensive. Frequently, these studies can take up to two years. It is important that if you request that Weill Cornell Medicine return ashes that you inform us of any changes in your contact information.

What is the final disposition of the body following the study?

- The body may be cremated by Weill Cornell Medicine, with ashes either returned or scattered at no cost borne to the family or estate.
- After studies have been completed, the body can be returned to an undertaker of your choice for private burial or cremation at the expense of the family or estate.

Must I notify an attorney to donate my body to medical science?

No. This type of gift does not have to be written in your will, although it is permissible to do so. You must complete "donor cards," and sign them in the presence of a witness. If you wish to make a donation, the Anatomy Division can send you a donor packet that contains the donor cards and all necessary information.

What if I or an immediate member of my family has a change of mind?

The completion and submission of these "forms" and "donor cards" in no way constitutes a legal contract. The donation of one's body after death is taken as an expression of one's personal desires for one's own reasons. It should be made known that he or she has simply made a prior arrangement and not a binding commitment. "Mind-changing" also applies to an immediate member of the family should they later decide they have any objections. However, the donor can formalize his or her wish into legal requirement, which may be done by adding a codicil to his or her will indicative of his or her wishes and further requesting that the executor and/or administrator carry out this wish.

Can Weill Cornell Medicine undertake final dispositions of the body?

Yes. If the family prefers, Weill Cornell Medicine can undertake final disposition of the body by cremation or burial in accordance with New York State Public Health Law (Article 42). This option involves no expense to the family or estate.

How about copies of the death certificate for probate?

Death certificates may be obtained from the funeral director, for which a modest fee is charged.

Can a service be held for the deceased?

Of course. However, since Weill Cornell Medicine must receive the un-embalmed remains of the deceased as soon as possible after death, a memorial service is advised as most practical.

What assurances would the family have regarding the treatment of the body?

Medical personnel are highly dedicated individuals who hold the life process in reverence. This respect for life is continued while the remains are in our care and protection. It is our solemn duty and honor to respect and carry out the final wishes of the donor and of the family.

What steps are to be taken after the death of the donor?

The next of kin, executor of the estate, or a friend is to notify the Anatomy Division at Weill Cornell Medicine. If the body is accepted, arrangements will be made for immediate transfer of the body to Weill Cornell Medicine. There will be no expense to the family or estate if the death occurred in the greater New York area.

The telephone numbers are (212) 746-5677 or (212) 746-0264.

During the nights, weekends, and holidays the telephone number is (845) 735-4849 for Assuma-Shankey Funeral Home. They assist Weill Cornell Medicine in retrieving the donor and bringing them to our facilities.