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What about body donation?

Have you thought about donating your body to science? If this is something that interests you, you need to give it careful thought, do the preplanning necessary, and most important of all – have an alternate plan in case your survivors are not able to fulfill your wishes. Organizations that receive body donations for science are bound by certain restrictions and not all bodies are accepted. Thus, the need for an alternative plan.

If you want to be an organ or tissue donor, you will not be able to donate your body to the Virginia State Anatomical Program. Except for corneas, this program requires an “intact” body. Organ and tissue donation is also a benefit to society, but usually one needs to choose between being an

organ donor and donating one’s body.

All members of FCA of the Virginia Blue Ridge receive in their membership packets the forms required by the Virginia State Anatomical Division to donate a body to the Virginia program. This program supplies the medical schools and other research or educational facilities in the state with cadavers they need for their study of human bodies. Not all bodies are suitable for medical study. A body that has been autopsied, embalmed, or is in the beginning stages of decomposition cannot be accepted. Not all bodies are suitable for medical study.

See Body donation, page 2

Consider donating organs, rather than burying them

More than 87,000 people are currently awaiting a life-saving organ transplant. There are simply not enough donors to meet the need. Most people who want to donate their organs or tissues after death can. People of all ages may be organ and tissue donors. Physical condition, not age, is important. If you have signed an organ donor card, physicians will

decide whether your organs and tissues can be transplanted.

Organs are removed surgically and it should not make a difference for open casket viewing, embalming, or other funeral preparation. Under no circumstances should the donor’s estate or family be charged for any cost incurred in the donation process.

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Organs from p. 1



Organs that can be donated successfully include kidneys, livers, lungs, hearts, intestines, and the pancreas. Tissue donation is sometimes possible even when organs are not usable. Tissue that is needed include heart valves, veins, corneas, bones and skin.

Donated organs and tissues are shared at the national level, but

the laws that govern donation vary from state to state. It is important to know what to do to ensure that your decision to donate is carried out. The Living Bank is the oldest and largest organ donor education organization in the United States. It maintains a national organ donor registry that keeps computerized records of organ donor data for future retrieval in an emergency.

Body donation from p. 1

Neither can a body be accepted with extensive burns, trauma, surgical incisions, and extreme obesity or emaciation.

A distressing event

Our office recently received a call from a distraught man in Pembroke, Virginia. His mother was in hospice care, dying of cancer and he remembered that she had expressed a wish to donate her body. During our conversation, he was very certain that the family wanted to use a specific funeral home in the area. The State Anatomical Program has regulations about that also. Bodies need to be taken to a place with refrigerated storage facilities – something which most of the funeral homes in our area do not have. When the family members had to choose between using another funeral home and donating the

mother's body, they decided that body donation was not what they wanted most. In addition to that, he was not completely certain exactly what his mother wanted, showing once again how important it is to have such conversations with family and to put your wishes in writing.

Death out of state

People also need to have alternative plans if death should occur outside of Virginia. The state does cooperate with other states and their anatomical programs, but those programs too have certain restrictions. Sometimes these state programs have enough bodies and cannot receive any more for the time being, and then the alternative plan will need to be used. Dying outside the United States also requires an alternative plan. Unfortunately, most of us cannot choose the place where we die. We are a mobile society so even the best plans need contingencies.



Virginia cooperates with other state body donation programs.

Law provides for donated body to return to family

A state law passed in 2000 addresses the return of donated bodies.

Return of bodies donated for scientific study. (Code 1950, § 32-359; 1979, c. 711; 2000, c. 477.)

Requires institutions and individuals who receive lawfully donated bodies for scientific study and health training to return any cremated remains to the decedent's next of kin or relatives after such study or training has been completed, if (i) the decedent has stipulated in writing before the death that the cremated remains should be returned to his next of kin, or (ii) the decedent's next of kin, who donated the body, requests the return of the cremated remains in writing at the time of donation. The bill provides that the institution or individual that received the decedent's body is not

obligated to return the cremated remains, if the name, current address and telephone number of the decedent's next of kin or relatives are not provided in the written request. The institution or individual receiving the body must bear the costs of transporting and delivering the cremated remains.

Moral – Wills are important for a variety of reasons.

Look for more information on body donations to commercial anatomical supply corporations in a future newsletter.



Request for the return of a donated body's cremated remains must be made in writing at the time of donation.

Have you considered serving on the board?

The nominating committee is beginning to work on the slate to present at our annual meeting in October. It isn't too early to think about volunteering to serve on the Board and participating directly in our ongoing activities. The Board meets monthly for about an hour. No experience is necessary. If you are interested or if you have someone to recommend, please send e-mail to fcavbr@bev.net or contact Isabel Berney, nominating committee chair, at 540-961-0804.

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Recommended reading

The current newsstand issue (March, 2005) of *SmartMoney* has an informative article for all members. It is titled "10 Things Your Funeral Director Won't Tell You." Joshua Slocum, national executive director of the Funeral Consumers Alliance is quoted several times.

Membership grows to 140

Our membership grows steadily, but we want to reach even more people. Mary Bishop of Roanoke recently requested information about Charlottesville prices and funeral homes for her mother's planning. We referred her to the FCA of the Piedmont, the Charlottesville affiliate, and provided her with some of our general information. She responded, "We're joining your chapter to plan for our own cremations, etc. Many thanks for this valuable service."

Don't keep the secret. Help spread the word among your acquaintances.