Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. **Is it necessary to include a body donation in the donor's will?**

   No. The intent to donate may be included in a will, but because a will may not be found in time for delivery of the body to the University, it is more effective to have these instructions readily available on a wallet donation card or donation form. The donor should also advise his or her family and legal representative of the intent to make a donation.

2. **Are there age restrictions on whole body donation?**

   No. The body of any person may be donated with appropriate consent by the donor or the donor's legal representative.

3. **Will the donor or donor's family be paid a fee for a body donation?**

   No. The state anatomical law (RUAGL) requires that the donation be a gift without compensation.

4. **Are there costs associated with body donation?**

   Yes. Although the University of Michigan Anatomical Donations Program does not charge a fee for its services, the donor's family or legal representative is responsible for certain costs. These costs can include:
   - Charges from the funeral home such as transportation, preparation of legal documents, and professional services;
   - Costs of making alternate arrangements for final disposition if the donation cannot be completed for any reason; and
   - Costs from other entities outside the University of Michigan Anatomical Donations Program.

5. **Can an anatomical gift be revoked?**

   Yes. An anatomical gift is revocable until death, then becomes irrevocable. A gift may be revoked by contacting the University of Michigan Anatomical Donations Program in writing. A revocation meeting all legal requirements is effective upon receipt, but will not apply to actions taken before notice is received. After death, the family or legal representatives of a donor may not revoke an authorization without a court order.

6. **Are there circumstances when a donation could not be used?**

   Yes. Medical conditions including emaciation or obesity, extensive burns, mutilation, advanced decomposition, or a history of contagious diseases (hepatitis, AIDS, Creutzfeldt-Jakob, tuberculosis, active MRSA, VRE, etc.) would
make a donated body unusable. Cause of death may also be a factor. To help avoid any surprise or disappointment, family members should be advised as early in the donation process as possible that the final determination on the suitability of a donation will be made after death.

7. **What is the procedure at the time of death?**

   The family or the funeral director should call (734) 764-4359 promptly for instructions, so that a determination of acceptability and other arrangements can be made as soon as possible.

8. **What is the procedure if a donation cannot be used?**

   If an anatomical donation is not accepted for any reason, the donor's legal representative is responsible for making alternate arrangements at the expense of the donor's estate.

9. **What are examples of uses for education or research?**

   Most donations are used to teach medical and dental students, and in continuing education programs. A small number are used to teach students in allied health fields such as nursing and physical therapy. Some donations are used for research, such as by surgeons to study new operative techniques. Some education or research, such as work to increase safety for individuals in the military, law enforcement, or sports, may involve exposures to destructive or damaging forces (e.g. impacts, crashes, ballistic injuries, and blasts). The use of donations for education or research can include photographic, video, or media images of parts of the body.

10. **May an institution other than the University of Michigan use a donor's body?**

    Possibly. The University of Michigan Anatomical Donations Program may in its sole discretion allow a donor's body to be utilized by another institution or entity as permitted by the RUAGL for education or research. In these cases, the donor's body will then be returned to the Program for final disposition after the educational or research use is complete.

11. **Is it likely that the donor's body will be used in research studying a disease the donor had?**

    Generally no. Any use for research would be determined by specific researcher requests pending at the time of the donor's death.

12. **What is the meaning of the terms temporary donation and permanent donation?**
Temporary Donation means the donor's remains will be used in a manner to be determined by the Anatomical Donations Program, and will be ready for return or interment within approximately 18 months.

Permanent Donation gives the University the option to keep the donor's remains without time constraints. Following use of the donor's body, the University of Michigan will bury the ashes at the University burial plot. When Permanent donation is selected, the donor's body or ashes will not be returned to the donor's representative.

13. Will the University of Michigan accept a body if the donor dies out-of-state?

Because of transportation costs, legal issues, and potential deterioration of the donor's body, we recommend that a donor's body be donated to a recipient in the area where death occurs. If, however, the family wishes to make the arrangements, bear the cost, and ensure a prompt delivery, we can accept the donation, if it otherwise meets the requirements for donation.

14. May the donor's family have a funeral service before the donor's body is delivered to the Medical School?

Typically, yes. However, the funeral director must first contact our office, since failure to follow allowable procedures could prevent the intended donation.

15. Is it possible for an ambulance service or even the donor's family to deliver the donor's body to the Medical School?

No. A licensed funeral director must arrange for delivery of the donor's body to ensure protection of public health and compliance with all related laws and policies.

16. When will work with the donation be completed and the ashes returned?

If a donor chooses a temporary donation, work with the donation will be completed within approximately 18 months. At that time, the ashes will be returned to the donor's representatives (if previously arranged) or interred in conjunction with the University's Annual Memorial Service. If a donor chooses to make a permanent donation, the ashes are not returned. Instead, they eventually will be cremated and interred in conjunction with the Annual Memorial Service.

17. Is there a memorial service for the donors?
Yes. The University of Michigan Medical School conducts an annual memorial burial service commemorating donors. Family members will be notified of the date, time, and place of the burial service.

18. Can individual markers be purchased?

Yes. The donor or donor’s legal representative (generally a family member) should make arrangements directly with Washtenong Memorial Park. All costs are the responsibility of the donor or the donor’s estate.

19. Are donors cremated after the donation process?

Yes. It is the strict University policy to cremate all donors after the donor has served their educational or research purpose.

20. Can ashes be exhumed after being buried in the University plot?

No. Ashes buried in our cemetery plot cannot and will not be exhumed under any circumstance or situation.

21. Will my family receive a report of your findings?

No. We do not conduct autopsies or maintain reports.

22. Are the ashes that are returned or buried 100% of the donor’s body?

Under the majority of circumstances, yes. However, the Anatomical Donations Program does reserve the option to retain limited samples of tissues, bones and organs for future education or medical research. Two examples could be the temporal bones (e.g., a small bone located near the ear cavity) or an entire or partial organ such as the liver or heart.