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NEWS

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*****Willed Body Program

DALLAS--Somehow the myth persists that people can sell their bodies to "Science." Not true. People can, however, give their bodies to the education of physicians.

Dr. William Gonyea, director of the Willed Body Program at The University of Texas Health Science Center in Dallas, points out that buying bodies is against the state law. But he currently has about 7,000 bequests on file from people who, for various reasons, have willed their bodies to the UT medical school. He says some people wish to repay the medical profession for services or for training they received as medical students. Some people decide to leave their bodies to the school to spare their families the grief and expense of a funeral.

Administrative secretary Glenda Graham receives about 50 requests per week for information on the program. She sends inquirers two brochures and duplicate legal forms authorizing the bequest of the donor's body. A donor keeps one form with his legal papers and returns one to the medical school office. At that time Graham sends the donor a card to carry in his wallet with the phone number of the Anatomical Services office at the school.

At the time of death a member of the family or hospital staff calls the Anatomical Services office, which is staffed by three licensed morticians. One of the three will pick up the body if it is in the Dallas area. Transportation by the school was just begun last fall.

"We try to relieve the family of as much responsibility as possible during this sad time. We take care of the death certificate and anything else we can. Our concern extends beyond just the receipt of the body," said Dr. Gonyea.

Anatomical Services supervisor Max Rolf checks back with the family to reassure them and to see if they have any questions. The school has the legal right to take a willed body, but if the next of kin do not want the body donated, the school respects their wishes. Dr. Gonyea stressed that the family should understand the donor's wishes ahead of time as this greatly expedites procedures at the time of death.

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The school now receives about 125 bodies per year, which enables student anatomy dissection teams of four rather than the teams of six in previous years. This provides for better medical education for physicians since, as Dr. Gonyea pointed out, "Clinical practice is based on a knowledge of the structure of the human body, which can be learned in no other way than dissection."

Following dissection the family can arrange to have the cremated remains returned to them. About 15 percent of the families do so. If the family does not request this, the ashes are interred in the campus bird sanctuary.

Body donors can also donate their organs for transplant, but they are responsible for making their own separate arrangements.

A Willed Body Program card in the wallet alerts the hospital personnel to the body donation, and a Uniform Donor card serves the same purpose for organ donation.

For information on the Willed Body Program, call 688-2232. On donating kidneys, call the Kidney Foundation of Texas, 638-7558; skin and eyes, the Lions Sight and Tissue Foundation, 688-3908.

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