Frequently Asked Questions

Who may donate?
Donors must be at least 18 years of age and competent to make the decision to donate. There is no maximum age limit. Registration as a donor in our Willed Body Program does not mean that the body donation is always accepted, as that decision is made at the time of death at the discretion of the Program. It is wise to have an alternative plan, as there are restrictions on the condition of bodies that we are able to accept.

Are there any circumstances or conditions where my body will not be accepted?
Yes, the Willed Body Program may decline any donor body that may not be suitable for educational purposes. There are a number of conditions that preclude us from accepting the donation, such as:

- History of contagious disease (hepatitis, AIDS, tuberculosis, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, MRSA, VRE, virulent herpes, etc.)
- Organs (other than eyes) have been removed at or near the time of death, such as for organ donation and/or autopsy
- Severe obesity, jaundice, or body contractures
- Advanced decomposition of body
- Trauma, such as that suffered during an automobile accident, drowning, homicide, etc.

In the event that the Willed Body Program determines that the donor body is unusable, the next of kin will need to make alternative arrangements for the final disposition. The Willed Body Program cannot be responsible for any costs associated with alternative arrangements.

How do I will my body to the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso (TTUHSC-EP) Paul L. Foster School of Medicine?
If you are interested in donating your body to help educate our future medical professionals, you will first need to contact our program via email, mail, or phone and ask for the willed body program donation forms. You can also download and print the forms from our website. We will provide a pack of four forms (two are for information only), two of which will need to be completed and mailed back to us. The Donation Form will need to be completed and signed by you and two witnesses. The Personal Data Sheet will also need to be completed and returned.
The Willed Body Program can also accept donation of deceased persons who did not register with our program prior to passing away. The next of kin may contact the Willed Body Program to initiate the donation process and they will be asked to fill out a Next of Kin Donation Form.

**How will I know that you received my donation forms?**
When we receive your completed and signed Donation Form as well as your completed Personal Data Sheet we will send you a letter of acknowledgement and a donor wallet card. Please sign your card and carry it with you at all times, as it includes a statement of your intent to donate to our Willed Body Program.

**Is there any cost to my family associated with donating my body?**
Generally, there is no cost to your family. A fee of $150 applies if your family elects to have the cremated remains returned upon completion of the course. If your family does not elect to have the cremated remains returned, then there is no fee as long as you are within El Paso County. If you pass away outside El Paso County, your estate would need to pay for transportation to the medical school.

**Who does the embalming and is my family responsible for this expense?**
The embalming procedure takes place at the medical school by an individual licensed in mortuary science once the donor body is received. This is done at no cost to your family.

**Will my family or next of kin receive any payment for the donation of my body?**
No. Texas law prohibits such payments.

**Can my family hold a funeral service?**
It is important that we receive the body as soon as possible after death, so most families choose to have a memorial service without the body present. Additionally, the family may request to have their loved one’s ashes returned upon completion of the anatomical studies course and they may prefer to hold a service at that time. Clergy or funeral directors can easily arrange services of this type. If the family feels strongly about holding a funeral prior to the donation the funeral director would need to contact our department first for specific embalming instructions.

**Should I tell anyone of my intent to donate?**
While it is not a requirement that you inform your family of your decision to donate, it is encouraged. Family members may need some time to understand this unique and generous decision so it is best to begin discussing your wishes with your family once you initially make the decision to donate. Ideally, you should inform your next of kin or the executor of your estate and provide copies of your donation paperwork. We also advise that you notify your physician, clergy and attorney of the arrangements.
**What happens to my body after studies are completed?**
We are required by law to cremate all donors.

**What happens to the remains after they are cremated?**
The cremated remains may be returned to the next of kin if the request is made in advance. A $150 fee applies when requesting the return of cremated remains. The ashes will be mailed by certified mail so it is imperative that we have a current address and phone number for you and your next of kin. In the event that the next of kin prefers not to receive the ashes or does not request the return of the ashes, the cremated remains will be buried in a shared cemetery plot.

**Can I change my mind once I register as a donor?**
Yes, at any time by writing the TTUHSC-EP Paul L. Foster School of Medicine Willed Body Program and destroying your donation forms.

**What procedure should be followed upon my death?**
At time of death, contact should be made to the mortuary service that will be responsible for removal. The contact number is: 915-838-1200. It should be explained that the deceased is a registered donor with our program or that the nearest surviving relative wishes to make a donation to our Medical School. The mortuary service will verify enrollment in our donor program, or provide a Next of Kin donation form if the deceased did not pre-enroll.

**What happens if I have donated my body to TTUHSC-EP Paul L. Foster School of Medicine but I die out of town or in another state?**
Your family may choose to have your body transported (through a mortuary service) to our Medical School at the expense of your estate within 12 hours. Alternatively, your family may choose to donate your body to a medical school located in the state in which your death occurred.

**What if my family is not around when I die?**
If you carry the donor card that we provide to you in your purse or wallet, it will be understood that you are a donor in our program. If not, your family members will need to know of your request ahead of time so they can contact our Willed Body Program.

**Can I donate my body for research into a specific disease?**
No, we primarily use donors for medical education to ensure that our future physicians are properly trained. We cannot accept bodies to ascertain the cause of death or for specific disease research.