Meg O’Connor – Donor Memorial Service Speech

Welcome friends, family, educators, students, and honored guests. My name is Meg O’Connor and I am a student of the Physical Therapy program here on the Anschutz Medical Campus. I had the honor of learning from our donors and wanted to share my gratitude with all of those touched by them.

As physical therapists, we are known as the “movement experts.” We aim to partner with our patients to access the joy of life in motion. Many of us know the feeling of movement, but not the how, not the why. This is where donors provide an enormous gift to those of us committed to learning the intricacies of movement. At first glance, learning movement from someone who has passed away and remains so still may seem counterintuitive. But the basis of movement comes from the shape of a muscle, the curves of a bone, the tension of a tendon weaving together to become what we see in every motion we make. Our donors provide an opportunity to learn in a way that no textbook or computer program could ever teach us, one that we base our profession on.

As we get to know our donors, we are reminded daily of their humanity. The perfectly manicured nails painted a shade of cherry blossom pink. The callouses from a wedding band, or gripping a heavy load day after day. The freckles from being out in the sun. Surgical incisions whitened by time. Or the tattoo long faded from the day they sat under a needle. This person lived a life that we can only imagine, and I never want to disrespect their memory by trying to fill in the gaps with stories we create without knowing them. But we do know each person was also generous enough to be a part of someone else’s life even after they left the world.

We take the memories of them with us as we forge forward. In that way, they become immortal. Each student they quietly taught will take their memory into the future. Those same students will teach others what they learned in those moments from your friend, your family member, your loved one. The impact of their gift truly knows no end.

Our donors do not only teach anatomy and motion while reminding us of the humanity behind it. They also inspire. The courage, openness, and generosity that our donors showed by donating their bodies to educating future providers was truly inspiring to me. I had never considered what would become of my body once I left it. Because of the depth of knowledge and understanding provided by your loved ones, friends, and family members, I am inspired to pay it forward in a similar fashion for my future providers and am in the process of adding my name to the donor registry. I hope to live a full life that will leave students wondering who I was, who I cared for, what I loved, what each day was like for me. I hope they will learn their practice the way I have had the opportunity to and to inspire them the same way.

To all of our honored guests here today, who knew our donors’ stories, know that in their act of generosity, they have provided a new thread to weave into a stranger’s tale, and we will forever be grateful for their gift. Thank you for letting us share our experiences with you today.

Finally, thank you, to each and every donor who has touched our lives, wherever you may be now. You will never be forgotten.