Donor Memorial Speech
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Coming into medical school, everything is exciting. You get to do things that only a privileged minority get to do. Direct patient contact, access to abundant knowledge, and...human dissection.

The first day I was in the lab, I remember walking out, covered in sweat and formalin, thinking how I had had no idea what that was going to be like. As the block continued we got the legs, I saw arthritic knees from years of the weight they had to hold...the arms, when everyone crowded our donor to see their astonishingly unique brachial plexus...the heart, a bypass with the great saphenous vein that we had assumed, in our ignorance, we'd just missed while at his leg.

Then, the brain. With the memories, knowledge, emotions and lessons that this person had gathered in their life...things I would never get to know about them. I looked down at the table, having touched every organ, explored every corner, and I was struck with the privilege I possess. This human being, and countless before, had died...and given their whole self in order for us to learn. In order for this field of medicine to march forward and progress...without them.

If this sacrifice leads to some cure, or cutting edge treatment, they receive no reward, no payout, and often no recognition. I benefit, future patients benefit, from this life that has been lost.

But, in a different way, they live on forever from the lessons we gathered from our time with them. Our careers, quite literally, began with their sacrifice. I think this realization is when you fully commit to the profession. The gravity of your responsibility hits you, and you look down, and everything becomes clearer, albeit scarier. Every person I've come across in this process approached this distinct responsibility with veracity, and integrity. We work not only to be the best we can be, but to honor the sacrifice that so many have made for us to even get to this point.

As we finished up our time in the lab, we left our donors with a new, intimate understanding of the human body and the life it represents. And we will always remember their lessons as our first patient and teacher.