NEUROLOGIC DISEASE AUTOPSY AND DONATIONS FOR MEDICAL SCIENCE

The following are options and preplanning arrangements to consider if your loved one has expressed an interest in donating tissue to medical science after death.

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO HOSPITAL AUTOPSY: An autopsy, including collection of tissue for medical science, is offered at no charge to families of individuals who have been evaluated within the last 5 years at University of Colorado Hospital (UCH) or its satellite clinics. The autopsy itself is free of charge to the family. **Note, however, that transportation of the deceased to and from UCH will generate a slight cost to the family; these charges are normally incorporated into the overall funeral expenses.** Family members can discuss transportation costs with the funeral home; plan to contact several mortuaries as charges do vary (see Funeral Home Directory link).

Per family wishes and those of your loved one, the type of autopsy procedure can be:

- Limited to evaluation of the central nervous system, muscle, and nerve or
- Complete, with evaluation of all organ systems

The autopsy procedure is not disfiguring and does not preclude an open casket.

**It is strongly advised that arrangements be made for autopsy prior to the death of your loved one.** This allows UCH personnel to be aware of pending cases and optimally handle consenting and scheduling when the need arises. Families should contact the Office of Decedent Affairs (720-848-4356) during normal business hours. This conversation will entail specifics about the types of autopsy available, the importance of selecting a mortuary ahead of time, and the likelihood of transportation charges. The consent process can be preplanned and is highly recommended; however, keep in mind that actual permission can only legally be given AFTER the death of your loved one. Even if the donation was the expressed wish of the deceased, the next-of-kin must give permission for the autopsy. Next-of-kin is a person’s closest living blood relative(s). The person who is considered the legal “next-of-kin” is determined in descending order as follows:

- Spouse (separated is acceptable, divorced is not)
- Adult Son/Daughter (oldest to youngest, including adopted)
- Father/Mother
- Brother/Sister
- Grandfather/Grandmother
- Uncle/Aunt
- Legal guardian
- Other Person Assuming Responsibility for Burial

The next-of-kin can give permission over the telephone. This involves a short conversation with Decedent Affairs’ personnel during normal business hours. If the death occurs on a weekend, please leave a message at the Office of Decedent Affairs (720-848-4356) and have
your loved one’s body transported to your contracted mortuary in the interim. Consent can be obtained on the next business day, at which point the mortuary may transport to the UCH morgue. The consent process will involve specification of the limitations of the examination (see above).

**Autopsy Reports:** Autopsy reports are completed in approximately 6-8 weeks, depending on the complexity of the case. Upon completion, a “Next-of-kin letter,” which summarizes the most important autopsy findings noted during the evaluation of your loved one, is mailed to the legal next of kin. Please note that autopsy reports are not mailed directly from the Department of Pathology, but from Health Information Management (Medical Records). Both a copy of the death certificate and release form are required (the latter is included with the “next-of-kin letter”). For additional information, please contact Medical Records at 720-848-1031.

**Benefits of Autopsy:** If your loved one undergoes autopsy at UCH, medical science is directly benefited both from the standpoint of training and by way of contributing to ongoing research projects investigating neurologic and other diseases. Doctors who cared for your family member, including physicians in training, have the opportunity to learn about your loved one’s neurological disorder. (Teaching hospitals such as UCH are required to incorporate information obtained at autopsy as part of the infrastructure for residency and fellowship training. Autopsy results are also utilized as correlation with the patient’s clinical disorders / diagnoses in life.) In addition, much remains to be discovered about the pathogenesis of most neurologic disorders. Information obtained at autopsy can contribute to the understanding of the disease process as part of ongoing research projects.

**"BRAIN BANK" ALTERNATIVE:** Another option to contribute to medical science is to donate your loved one’s brain tissue to a neurologic disease "brain bank." There are many reputable institutions across the country that have ongoing programs dedicated to research on specific disease processes. However, please keep in mind that such donations must be arranged with the brain bank well before death. If you or your loved one has a movement disorder, you may obtain a list of brain banks for disorders such as Parkinson disease from the Movement Disorders Clinic. Due to the costs involved, brain bank donation may not always be feasible. In the case of a very rare neurological disease, however, the costs may be waived.

**COLORADO STATE ANATOMICAL BOARD:** Yet another approach to fulfill your loved one’s wish to donate tissue to medical science after death is through body donation via the Colorado State Anatomical Board: [http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/medicalschool/departments/CellDevelopm entalBiology/anatomicalboard/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/medicalschool/departments/CellDevelopm entalBiology/anatomicalboard/Pages/default.aspx)

Body donation plays a pivotal role in educating our future health care professionals. Such generosity assists students in understanding the complexity and intricacy of human anatomy but can also be helpful to researchers studying new surgical or regenerative techniques to better serve patients. Please visit their website (referenced above) to better familiarize yourself with this viable option.
**QUESTIONS:** If you have additional questions about the neurologic disease autopsy program, please contact the Office of Decedent Affairs at 720-848-4356.