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April 10, 2026

Honoring Donors, Saving Lives: Setting the Record Straight on Anatomical Donations at UC

For decades, thousands of Californians have made an extraordinary choice: to donate their bodies after death for education and research, including medical skills training that enables life-saving care. That decision reflects trust in our medical institutions, our educators, and our commitment to improving health for future generations. At the University of California, we recognize the gravity of the trust and the profound gift to the community that such a donation represents, and we approach that responsibility with the utmost seriousness.

Recently, questions have been raised about how anatomical donations are used in medical training programs involving partner institutions. These questions deserve clear answers.

First, the purpose of UC's anatomical donation programs is to advance education, clinical training and research. Donated remains are used to educate trainees and help physicians, surgeons and health care teams develop the skills required to improve and save lives. UC may, in limited circumstances, collaborate with other accredited educational institutions that request the use of donated remains, as outlined in [UC donor agreements](#). In such situations, a UC review panel of medical education experts and professionals evaluates the proposed use to determine if it meets UC's rigorous standards for scientific and educational merit. This type of training is not abstract; it directly affects outcomes for patients in emergency rooms and operating rooms every day.

Second, UC does not sell donated remains under any circumstance, and any statement or implication to the contrary is false. While fees may be received from other institutions associated with the lending of anatomical donations, these fees are limited to recovery of the significant costs involved in honoring a donor's gift: transportation, preparation, preservation, facilities, and final disposition. In many cases, anatomical donation programs operate at a deficit. This work is part of fulfilling UC's public mission, not a commercial, for-profit enterprise.

Recent reports about UC's lending of donated remains to a program attended by military medical personnel mischaracterized the use for which UC has loaned remains to the University of Southern California. The program in question is a USC medical education trauma surgical skills course conducted in a clinical setting and

delivered according to the [American College of Surgeons national standards](#). These courses are attended by various licensed physicians and health care professionals, including those who serve in military medical corps. The skills they practice are essential to all health care professionals: how to treat traumatic injuries, control bleeding, and save lives. The course allows participants to build medical skills and does not involve use of weapons to inflict trauma. In courses of this type, it is common that medical professionals who participate will reveal anatomical structures through dissection and practice repair on those structures to improve their patient care skills – all in a clinical setting.

We recognize that donors and their families want to understand how donated remains may be used, and we welcome and support inquiry into this important topic. [UC donor agreements, which have been and remain publicly available](#), describe the educational and scientific uses of anatomical gifts that we support. We're also committed to continually reviewing how we communicate with donors and their loved ones so that they can make fully informed decisions.

Every anatomical donation represents a final act of service to others. At UC, our responsibility is to ensure that gift is used ethically, respectfully and for the advancement of human health.

We remain committed to that responsibility.

Brandi Schmitt
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