



Retention of Organs and Tissue after a Coroner's Post Mortem

A Guide for the Bereaved

This leaflet is designed to tell you what happens to organs and tissue following a Coroner's post mortem examination, which is carried out as part of the legal process for establishing the cause of death and is compulsory.

What are retained organs and tissues?

- Retained organs and tissue are whole organs and/or pieces of tissue that have been removed at a post mortem examination carried out by a Coroners Pathologist (a doctor who specialises in diagnosis of disease by studying tissues).
- They are normally kept for further examination to determine the cause of death or possibly later used for research, teaching, education and training.
- They include organs, or tissue blocks and slides taken from organs. The main organs are the brain, heart, lungs, liver and kidney. There are also other smaller organs such as pituitary glands that produce hormones.
- Tissue blocks are small pieces of organs. The tissue 'blocks' are specially prepared so that they become hard and very thin sections can be cut.
- The thin sections are placed on glass slides and stained with special dyes so that the cells can be examined under a microscope. More than one slide may be cut from a block.
- The tissue will be categorised as blocks, slides and wet tissue.

Some tests carried out after deaths require laboratory preparation of the organ or tissue so that a proper examination can be made. This particularly applies to the brain. If brain disease or injury is suspected, it can only be properly diagnosed if the brain is fixed with chemicals so that it can be examined by eye and under the microscope. The process of fixation takes about four weeks to complete, or may take longer. Thus, if the brain is being examined to establish the cause of death, in many cases burial or cremation of the body will already have happened. This raises the question of the subsequent disposal of the organ or tissue.

Options for Disposal of Retained Organs and Tissue

You can choose what happens after any tests are completed; the Coroner's Office will discuss with you the choices available for dealing with disposal of the organs and tissue. You can take as much time as you need to decide with family and friends what you would like to do.

The options for respectful disposal, donation or return of retained organs and tissues are:

- to be reunited with the body before burial / cremation, understanding that this may delay the funeral.
- the Coroner's Office to arrange the return of the tissue(s) to the family's appointed Funeral Director to be disposed of in a lawful way
- the Hospital carrying out the examination may dispose of the tissue(s) in a lawful and respectful way (by incineration)
- family arrange for the tissue(s) to be disposed of in a lawful way
- the Hospital may retain the tissue(s) as part of the deceased's medical records or dispose of in a lawful way (by incineration)
- the Hospital may retain the tissue(s) for research and teaching purposes or dispose of in a lawful way (by incineration)

What is respectful disposal?

Respectful disposal may involve a ceremony that recognises the fact that human organs and tissue are being dealt with. Each hospital has its own procedures so you may like to ask them for further details.

Is there anything else we should know before making a decision?

- Cremation of tissue blocks and slides may not always be possible as local crematoria may not always be willing to accept them for cremation. Your Coroners Office will advise you what is possible in your local area.
- When organs, tissue blocks and slides or babies' bodies are cremated there are usually no ashes.
- Burial may take place in a family burial plot or elsewhere, funeral directors and burial authorities can offer advice on this.
- If you wish the burial to take place in an area that is not a churchyard or cemetery a funeral director or your local council can advise you.
- Your Funeral Director may also be able to offer information on alternative options such as woodland burial.
- Once you have made a decision and informed the Coroner's Office, a time can be agreed for return, and respectful disposal can take place. A Funeral Director or a family representative can act for your family at this stage if you do not want to be involved in the process.

What feelings might I experience?

No one can tell you exactly how you will feel. Some individuals will find that dealing with such sensitive issues reawakens feelings of grief and loss. There is no right way and some people experience a whole range of different emotions at different times, it may also help to talk over the way you feel with someone you trust. You may find it hard to help each other, but there are experienced people who may be able to assist.

Where can I go for further information, help and support?

Your Coroner's Office will offer support and advice, as will your Funeral Director. Whilst the organizations below cannot be endorsed by the Coroner Service you may also wish to make contact where applicable.

Assist Trauma Care Provides a confidential service to give counselling, support, understanding and friendship for anyone affected by post traumatic stress disorder. People affected by organ retention have recommended this service.	11 Albert Street, Rugby, Warwick CV21 2RX; Office 01788 551 919; Helpline: 01788 560 800 www.assist-traumatic-stress.freeserve.co.uk
Cruse Bereavement Care CRUSE is a voluntary organisation, which gives support and encouragement to bereaved people. It has no religious or political affiliations, and everyone is welcome.	Cambridge - St. Luke's Church Centre, Victoria Road, Cambridge CB4 3DZ; Tel: 01223 302 662 www.cambridge-cruse.fsnet.co.uk National Bereavement Helpline: 0845 226 7227 Website: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk
Child Bereavement Trust Information and support for professionals and parents.	Helpline: 0845 357 1000 Website: www.childbereavement.org.uk/
Child Death Helpline Support offered from bereaved parent volunteers to anyone affected by the death of a child.	Child Death Helpline , Great Ormond Street Hospital, Great Ormond Street, London, WC1N 3JH; Tel: 020 7813 8551; Free phone helpline: 0800 282 986 www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

<p>Department of Health</p> <p>Information regarding the removal, retention and use of human organs and tissue; Making a difference: progress in implementing policies to improve health and health care - Retention and use of human tissue and organs</p>	<p>www.dhgov.uk/en/Policyandguidance/Healthandsocialcaretopics/Tissue/index.htm</p>
<p>FSID</p> <p>Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths. Research and support and advice on sudden infant death.</p>	<p>Artillery House, 11-19 Artillery Row, London SW1 1RT; Tel: 0870 787 0885 ; 24-hour helpline Tel: 0870 787 0554</p> <p>Website: www.sids.org.uk/fsid/</p>
<p>INQUEST</p> <p>Provides advice and information for anyone facing an inquest and has unique experience and knowledge of the inquest system.</p>	<p>89-93 Fonthill Road London N4 3JH; Tel: 020 7263 1111</p> <p>Website: www.inquest.org.uk</p>
<p>Local Contacts</p> <p>Groups or individuals who have been involved with organ retention and may be able to help and offer guidance or assistance to find out what you want to know.</p>	<p>EAST - the East Anglia Support Team Ann Freeman Tel: 01223 411 187; E-mail: ann@freeman5661.fsnet.co.uk Sue Bryce Tel: 07919 182 041; E-mail: suebryce@canyon157.fsnet.co.uk Tracy Johnson Tel: 01362 638 235 or 07962 003 045; E-mail: tubbyandtracy@yahoo.co.uk</p>
<p>Medical Research Council</p>	<p>Website: www.mrc.ac.uk/</p>
<p>Pity II</p> <p>A relatives support group set up by relatives and parents from Alder Hey. They now offer advice nationally.</p>	<p>Stanley Community Enterprise Centre, 71 Country Road, Walton, Liverpool L4 3QD; Tel: 0151 285 0016;</p> <p>Website: http://uk.geocities.com/pity2uk/HTML/</p>
<p>SANDS</p> <p>Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society – provides support for bereaved parents when their baby dies before, during or soon after birth.</p>	<p>28 Portland Place London W1B 1LY Tel: 020 7436 7940 Helpline: 020 7436 5881</p> <p>Website: www.uk-sands.org</p>
<p>The Samaritans</p> <p>Provides confidential emotional support for anyone in crisis.</p>	<p>National Helpline: 0845 790 90 90</p> <p>www.samaritans.org/</p>