Your legacy.
Their cure.

The Brain Tissue Resource Facility

VCU Health™
Your donation offers future
One of the most compelling areas of medical research is aimed at understanding the human brain and what goes wrong in disease. Research using donated brain tissue has allowed scientists to answer important questions about many brain diseases and further their understanding of normal and abnormal workings of the human brain. Research findings help create new targeted therapies for fighting diseases such as Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) — also known as Lou Gehrig’s disease and other neurodegenerative diseases. However, the limited supply of donated human brain tissues is directly related to the progress of understanding these conditions.

An introduction to brain tissue donation and the autopsy assistance program

“My husband, Jack, has made a contribution. He has given back for future families by donating his brain, so possibly we will have research that will slow down or end the disease.”

—Fran Zehmer
Why donate?

One reason people donate their brain or a loved one’s brain is to obtain a confirmed diagnosis (from an autopsy report) of a neurological disorder. There is no blood test that can confirm the diagnoses for these conditions. Brain donation and autopsy are the only way to know what disease — or combination of diseases — was present. Another reason for donation is to support research into the causes, treatments and cures for neurodegenerative disorders.

Discoveries made possible by tissue donation provide hope to families affected by brain disease. One donated brain can provide tissue for hundreds of independent research studies. The gift of brain donation enables discoveries that will have a lasting impact. The legacy of donation offers future generations the possibility of improved health and someday, a cure.

The process

The donor’s family plays a key role in the final decision of whether or not to obtain an autopsy and donate tissue. Family must give consent for the autopsy and brain donation to take place. This makes it very important that families and, if possible, the donor to discuss and preplan the decision for donation. Donors must register for the program by contacting the Brain Tissue Resource Facility coordinator to initiate the registration process at (804) 828-9662 or by filling out the attached donor registration card and mailing it to the address provided. An informational packet with instructions will then be sent. An autopsy will not be performed unless a valid consent is signed by the next of kin and a witness. Consent for an autopsy and/or tissue donation may be withdrawn at any time.

“The cure for neurodegenerative diseases relies on a foundation of basic science. As a patient and clinical research advocate, I know that tissue donations are the cornerstone of research into diseases such as Parkinson’s.”

—Fred Woodlief, DDS
If brain tissue is donated, please know this delicate tissue will be handled with the utmost care, compassion and respect in facilities with the latest in scientific technology.

Immediately following an autopsy, the body of the loved one is returned to the family for the funeral arrangements of their choice. An autopsy does not interfere with an open casket funeral or other traditional funeral arrangements. Transportation charges for the body to and from VCU Medical Center and the examination are covered for clients of the VCU Health Brain Tissue Resource Facility. Funeral expenses, however, remain the responsibility of the family.

The facility

The Brain Tissue Resource Facility (BTRF) at VCU Health was established in 2010 and is dedicated to helping families of patients with neurodegenerative diseases by exploring the possibility of an autopsy and human brain tissue donation for research. By bringing together the efforts of professionals from different disciplines within the VCU Health community, the BTRF makes it possible for families to gain the information needed about their loved ones disease and have peace of mind that their loved one will help to one day find a cure for these diseases.
Donor Registration Form

Please note: Consent may be withdrawn at any time.

Patient’s name ______________________________________________________ Date of birth ______________________________
Address __________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Phone _____________________________________________   Email ________________________________________________________

VCU Neurologist ________________________________________   Neurological disorder _____________________________________
Next of kin __________________________________________   Relationship to patient _______________________________________
Address __________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Phone _____________________________________________   Email ________________________________________________________
☐ Please check here if you have no known neurological disease and would like to register as a normal donor.

For further information or to submit this form, please contact:

VCU Health Brain Tissue Resource Facility
P.O. Box 980599
Richmond, VA 23298-0539
Phone (804) 828-9664
Email: brain.bank@vcuhealth.org

Disorders of the brain affect millions of children and adults, dramatically altering their lives and those of their families.