

## **HUMAN REMAINS**

### **May a physician obtain or have in his or her possession dead human bodies or body parts?**

Yes. Any state-licensed physician or surgeon, or any medical student under the authority of any such physician or surgeon, may obtain or have in his or her possession human dead bodies, or parts of human dead bodies, for the purposes of anatomical inquiry or instruction.<sup>1</sup>

### **Where does a physician obtain a dead human body or body parts?**

Generally, a public agency required to dispose of a body at public expense will give the body to a physician to use for the advancement of anatomical science. Preference will be given to Washington medical schools.<sup>2</sup>

A person may make an anatomical gift of his or her body for research or education to a hospital; an accredited medical school, dental school, college, or university; or an organ procurement organization.<sup>3</sup> See ANATOMICAL GIFTS.

### **Are there any procedures which must be followed in obtaining a body for anatomical study?**

Yes. In order to receive a body, a physician must provide to the board or officer surrendering the body certification from the county medical society or the county board of supervisors, stating that the physician is fit to receive the body. The physician must also provide a bond, with two sureties, that any body received will be used only for the promotion of anatomical science within the state of Washington and in a way that will not outrage the public feeling.<sup>4</sup>

Failure to follow these procedures may result in a fine of up to \$500.<sup>5</sup>

### **Is the improper disposition of human remains a crime?**

Yes. It is a crime to:

- Fail to notify the coroner of the existence and location of a dead body coming within the jurisdiction of the coroner, unless there is good reason to believe that the coroner has already been given notice.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> RCW 68.50.060.

<sup>2</sup> RCW 68.50.070(1)(a).

<sup>3</sup> RCW 68.64.100(1)(a).

<sup>4</sup> RCW 68.50.080.

<sup>5</sup> RCW 68.50.090.

<sup>6</sup> RCW 68.50.020. See also RCW 68.50.645.

- Remove or conceal a body without the approval of the deceased's next of kin and/or the coroner.<sup>7</sup>
- Detain or threaten to detain a body for any debt or lien.<sup>8</sup>
- Dissect a body without appropriate authorization.<sup>9</sup>
- Unlawfully dispose of human remains.<sup>10</sup>
- Unlawfully disturb, remove, or sell human remains.<sup>11</sup>

### **When does the coroner have jurisdiction over a body?**

A coroner has jurisdiction over a body:<sup>12</sup>

- When the deceased person came to death suddenly while in apparent good health without medical attendance within the 36 hours preceding death.
- When the circumstances of death indicate that death was caused by unnatural or unlawful means.
- When death occurs under suspicious circumstances.
- When a coroner's autopsy, inquest or postmortem is to be held.
- When death results from unknown or obscure causes.
- When death occurs within one year following an accident.
- When death is caused by any violence whatsoever.
- When death results from a known or suspected abortion, whether self-induced or otherwise.
- When death apparently results from drowning, hanging, burns, electrocution, gunshot wounds, stabs or cuts, lightning, starvation, radiation, exposure, alcoholism, narcotics or other addictions, tetanus, strangulation, suffocation or smothering.
- When death is due to still birth or premature birth.

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<sup>7</sup> RCW 68.50.050.

<sup>8</sup> RCW 68.50.120.

<sup>9</sup> RCW 68.50.100.

<sup>10</sup> RCW 68.50.130.

<sup>11</sup> RCW 68.50.140.

<sup>12</sup> RCW 68.50.010.

- When death is due to a violent contagious disease or suspected contagious disease which may be a public health hazard.
- When, in jail or prison, death results from alleged rape, carnal knowledge or sodomy.
- When a body is found dead and not claimed by relatives or friends.

**Is an autopsy required for every dead human body?**

No. See **AUTOPSIES AND POSTMORTEMS.**