“Saying Thank You”
Writing to Your Donor Family

Writing a Letter

Through organ donation, you have received the greatest gift of all, the gift of life.

You may be thinking about how to express your thanks to the family who offered donation after the loss of their loved one. This handout will guide you through the process of writing to your donor family.

The decision to write to your donor family is your own choice. It may help you to know the donor family will find comfort from the letters they receive from the recipients of their loved one’s organs. Research shows that the donor family will begin their healing process when they receive thanks from the recipient(s).

It is also vital to keep in mind the donor family has suffered the loss of a loved one and may choose not to respond for a long time, or at all. Don’t let that keep you from writing again.

Suggestions for Your Letter

It may not be easy to find the right words to express the thanks you feel to your donor family. Here are some tips for writing your first letter:

- For privacy reasons, do not include your last name, address, city, telephone number. You may include the name of the state you live in, but not your address.
- Acknowledge your donor family’s loss of a loved one.
- Say “thank you”. It may not capture all of your feelings, but it is a start!
- Include news about yourself, such as, what you do for work, hobbies and interests.
- Share stories about your family (spouse, children, grandchildren, etc). Use first names only.
- Tell your story. Explain how the transplant has changed your life. Describe what you are able to do as a result of the transplant.
- You may include pictures of yourself or your family.
Sample Letter

This is only a sample. Please put your thoughts in your own words.

Dear Donor Family,

It has been (one month, three months, etc.) since I received the gift of life through your loved one’s gift of organ donation. I want you to know that I continue to give thanks each day for this gift and often think of you and your family. I am so sorry for the loss of your loved one. I hope you can find some comfort knowing my life has fully changed because of your unselfish act. Words cannot express how thankful I am for your generosity and compassion. You have my deepest sympathy for the loss of your loved one, and my greatest thanks for the second chance at life.

Sincerely,
(Sign your first name only)

If you have questions or concerns about your letter, please contact the Organ Procurement Office at (608) 265-0356, or via e-mail at: DFS@uwhealth.org

Writing to the Donor’s Hospital and Care Takers

We strongly suggest that you thank the health care staff who cared for your donor prior to their death. Their compassion and support of your donor, and your donor’s family are key to the donation process. By sharing your thanks, you are letting them know that you realize how committed they are to organ and tissue donation and honor them as health care staff.

These staff members are vital to create a hospital culture that promotes organ donation, which allows more people to receive their gift of life. You can send your note of thanks to the UW Health OPO in the same manner outlined below. The OPO staff will ensure your letter gets to the correct hospital and staff members

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911.

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Sending Your Letter

All letters go through the UW Organ Procurement Organization to protect your privacy and that of the donor family. Send your letter to the address below and it will be sent on to your donor family. On a separate piece of paper, please write your full name and date of transplant and include it with your letter.

Send letters to: UW Health OPO
Donor Family Services
450 Science Drive
Madison, WI  53711-9135

You can also email your letter to: DFS@uwhealth.org
Any letters we receive from the donor family will be sent to you.

After you and your donor family have exchanged letters, you might agree to contact each other directly or schedule a time to meet. Before we release any personal information, UW Health OPO requires that the donor family and recipient sign a release form. Please call (608)265-0356 for more information.

Remember Your Donor

There are many ways to honor your donor. Listed below are some ideas:

- Plant a tree in memory of your donor.
- Offer a memorial service at your place of worship.
- Give to the UW Health OPO donor Education Fund in honor of your donor.
- Remember your donor family with a card or letter during the holiday seasons or special occasions. (No gifts please.)