

Following the recent NOS article and Nieuwsuur special, we've started to receive some questions about whole body donation. The piece was, unfortunately, missing some key details - below we help fill in the gaps about this life-saving process and how RISE Labs can help. For any other questions, please visit our website at RiseLabs.eu or email us at donorservice@riselabs.eu.

We are a small European company, with one mission: to improve healthcare around the world. We do this by helping compassionate individuals donate their bodies to the researchers working on the next medical marvel. Whole body donation is a sensitive and intensely personal decision and should be taken only after carefully considering all information available. When we speak with people considering donating their body to RISE Labs, we first explain the role of donation in medicine and what a donation could be used for. The second and equally important part of the conversation is about what we at RISE Labs do to ensure you are treated with the utmost respect after you pass.

Unfortunately, there is a lot of misinformation in the media and fear around this process, so we wanted to share all of this information with you here. Whether you choose to donate your body to RISE Labs, to another organization, or not at all, we hope it helps you understand the incredible, life-saving work that goes into your healthcare.

About Whole Body Donation

Medicine is where it is today because of whole body donors. Without their commitment and bravery, we would not have modern surgeries, life-changing medical devices, or skilled doctors.

When people hear "donating their body to science," they often think of someone donating their body to a university or medical school for students to practice surgery and other medical procedures. This is one type of donation and a very important one. These institutions, however, have strict requirements for what kind of donations they can accept. In most cases, they cannot accept bodies that are more than 70 years old and/or have had a chronic disease such as cancer. These universities also have limited space for donations and quite often turn people away. This leaves millions of people who want to donate their bodies to science unable to do so.

Limiting ourselves to only this kind of donation also ignores a key element of healthcare: the invention of medical devices and research of new treatments. By donating through intermediaries like RISE Labs, your donation can go to medical device companies and hospitals for their research. Unlike medical schools, these institutions do not have open donation policies. Because their work is so specialized, they use companies like ours to source exactly the type of organ/bodies they need for their research.

To show how this process works, let's imagine that medical device company A is working on a new pacemaker.

Step 1: The medical device company works with a researching doctor (or team of doctors) to design a new pacemaker - perhaps one that can be used over a lifetime, with no need for replacement. The researchers will need to use donated hearts to help design this new pacemaker - ensuring that, when it goes to human trial, that patients are not in danger. They will also need to use donated bodies to simulate surgery/implantation of the pacemaker. The medical device company reaches out to a company like RISE Labs to source the organs they need. In this example, it will likely be healthy hearts first; then hearts showing signs of heart disease; then full bodies to practice the surgery and implantation of the pacemaker.

Step 2: Once the researchers have a good design, they send it to an approving authority (the FDA in the United States, or the CE Mark in Europe). The evaluators at these institutions use both donated hearts/bodies as well as live patients to ensure the device is safe.

Step 3: Once the pacemaker is approved for use, the medical device company will use donated bodies to train doctors on how to use the pacemaker - this is common for any new kind of surgery or new device so doctors can practice. Hospitals often host this kind of training as well.

This process is how researchers have been able to develop game-changing insulin pumps for lifelong diabetics, move from open heart surgeries to low-impact laparoscopic procedures, and more. Their work (and the organ donation that makes it possible) is the foundation of modern medicine.

About RISE Labs

Our mission is to build a European network that is just as robust of a community for whole body donation in Europe as the American medical research ecosystem. We believe that the way to do that is by facilitating connection between European researchers, and their friends, neighbors and countrymen who share their passion for medical marvels. To do so, we accept bodies of all kinds, regardless of age or chronic disease, and manage them with care and respect. There is no cost to donate your body to RISE Labs, as we strongly believe that the human body is not a vehicle for financial profit. A small benefit of donating your body to science is that it can help save future funeral costs - we do not, however, accept any donations made purely for this reason. Whole body donation should only be done with full comfort and trust in your decision, and we do turn away donors who are only considering donation for this reason.

We then work with medical device companies and hospitals across Europe who are looking for organs or anatomical specimens for their research. We only partner with regulated, highly-qualified organizations who are committed to using your donation for good. We cannot guarantee where your organs will be used, because we cannot predict what kinds of life-saving devices or surgeries will be created tomorrow! We do charge a small fee to the medical institutions and companies that use the specimens - this is to cover our administration and logistics (including handling and storing of the specimens) and to help ensure that we can keep growing to accept more and more donations and help more researchers and educators in the EU.

The Future of Medicine

We know that whole body donation is a sensitive topic. No one wants to think about death, yet many of us yearn to have a positive impact on the world after we die. What drives us at RISE Labs every day are the conversations we have with our donors. Our donors come to us because they earnestly want to advance medicine - quite often, they've had a family member who has lived a longer and fuller life thanks to a new medical procedure or medical device. Through their selfless donations, we will keep working to improve the lives of people all around the world by providing doctors with the tools for better, more specialized healthcare.

To stay up to date with our work, follow us on LinkedIn. If you're interested in whole body donation, reach out to us at info@riselabs.eu - we'd be happy to help answer any questions.