I would like to specify that my organs be donated at the time of my death to Loma Linda University Medical Center Transplantation Department. Is there a way that I can specifically designate what medical institution receives my organs? If so, please explain the steps I need to take...

Organ transplantation has brought about a revolution in the treatment of diseases such as end-stage kidney, heart, and liver failure. Lung and pancreas transplants are being successfully performed. Corneal grafts restore vision to many. It has been half a century since the first successful human kidney transplant was performed in Boston, Massachusetts, using identical twins as donor and recipient (attempts at organ transplant date to the beginning of the twentieth century).

It is a noble wish to donate one’s organs for use after death. There are certain steps that need to be followed. Your wishes need to be recorded and legally documented. You would be wise to make these wishes known to your designated power of attorney, should you not be in a position to state your wishes at such a time.

Strict criteria are in place as to the suitability of organs for transplantation. There must be no disease process involving the specific organs required; there can be no bacterial or viral infection—including hepatitis B, C, and HIV. Much research has been done on the medical care of the potential organ donor to ensure the best possible outcomes for the recipient.

One can certainly specify the institution where the donated organs should be used. Limiting circumstances may be present, such as distance from the specified center at the time of death of the donor. However, methods to preserve and transport can be employed so that in many situations the wishes of the donor may be honored. One may also specify exclusive benefit to a particular situation.

It is a wonderful thing to continue the cycle of life by benefiting others in need. Through such benevolence, we begin to understand a little more fully the words of Ezekiel 36:26: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”

We all need this kind of transplant on a moment-by-moment basis. May God bless you as you unselfishly strive to help others.

To find out more about organ donation, visit the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Web site at www.organdonor.gov.

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