

Update from the Director of the University of Maryland Brain and Tissue Bank

After 25 years as director of a brain and tissue bank I have observed a distinct change in attitude on the importance of human tissue and research. In the 1990s the value of post-mortem human tissue was questioned because of the varied background of the donors and the length of time between death and tissue recovery. It was thought that these factors added unknown variables to scientific studies. Since that time it has been established that human genes, especially in the brain, are stable for at least 30 hours after someone dies. As more individuals make tissue donation, variables for age, sex and recovery times can be taken into account. Perhaps most important is that it has become clear that while rodent models are helpful for preliminary research on human diseases, rodents are not people! There are unexpected differences between rodents and humans, especially in the way they respond to drugs. If all drugs that have “cured” cancer in rats worked in humans, we no longer would worry about cancer. The same can be said for other diseases.

Therefore, it is with great gratitude that individuals and families in the greatest crisis of their lives are willing to donate parts of themselves so that the day will come when no one with ALS will die due to ALS. For our part we gratefully acknowledge the support provided by the Blazeman Foundation to inform the ALS community of the need for tissue donors and to cover the considerable expense of tissue recovery. In the last 12 months seven individuals with ALS have left a lasting memorial that will allow researchers to address the many as yet unexplored aspects of ALS and bring us closer to a cure.

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UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND BRAIN AND TISSUE BANK - An Affiliate of the NIH NeuroBioBank: <https://neurobiobank.nih.gov>

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