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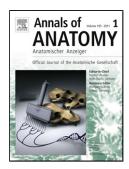
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Human body donation in Thailand: donors at Khon Kaen University

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Abstract: Background: Culture, society and spirituality all contribute to variability in the characteristics of human body donors and donation programmes worldwide. The donors and the body donation programme at Khon Kaen University, northeast Thailand, reflect all these aspects of Thailand, including the status accorded to the donors and the ceremonial acknowledgment of the donors and their families.

Methods: Data from the programme records and from surveys of samples of currently registering donors and recently received donor bodies are analysed to define the characteristics of both registering and received donors, including motivation, demography, socio-economic status, health, and use of the bodies.

Findings: The body donation programme at Khon Kaen University currently has a very high rate of registration of body donors, with gender and age differences in the patterns of donation. Registrants include more females than males, a long-standing pattern, and are an average age of 50 years. The bodies of 12% of registrants are received after death and include more males than females. Both sexes are of an average age of 69 years. Males had registered their donation eight years prior to death and females ten years prior. Current registrants identified altruistic motives for their decision to donate, although the coincidence of body donation by a highly revered monk with a surge in donations in 2015 suggests that Buddhism plays a primary role in motivation. The opportunity to make merit for donors and their families, and respect shown to donors and the nature of the ceremonies acknowledging the donorsand their families, including the use of the Royal Flame at the cremation ceremony, all contribute to decisions to donate.

Conclusions: The characteristics of body donors and the body donation programme at Khon Kaen University are reflective of Thai society and the centrality of Buddhism to Thai culture.

Keywords: Body donation; Motivation; Buddhism; Thai society; Gender

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