Good afternoon,

My name is Anthony Gaziano and I am a second year Physical Therapy student at the University of Iowa. First, I would like to thank you all for being here today to honor, remember, and celebrate the lives of each of the donors. We commemorate these individuals who gave the ultimate gift – the donation of their bodies so that future generations of health professionals could learn the intricate and profound art of human anatomy.

To the families here today, I extend my condolences and gratitude. You too have made a significant sacrifice, allowing your loved ones to fulfill a virtuous calling. I may not have personally known your loved ones but as a clinician in training, I can form a hypothesis as to what type of virtues and morals they held. During their lives, your loved ones shared moments and created memories with you that will last forever. And in death, your loved ones greatly impacted the lives of future healthcare professionals and the many patients we will eventually serve. What a selfless and courageous act.

One evening during a grueling night of studying, I remembered I had left my lab coat, which needed a long overdue washing, in the anatomy lab. Without thinking much of it, I walked over the lab alone. As I scanned my badge and entered the lab, I couldn’t help but pause in my steps. I froze. The only time I was ever in the lab was with a group of my classmates. But here I was, alone. Or was I. As I stood there, I began to ponder all of the lives your loved ones lived and all of the lives your loved ones touched. I began to think to myself, “these donors were human beings that laughed, cried, and loved, just like I do”. The significance and humanity of anatomy lab and these donor’s sacrifices truly set in that day.

The decision to donate one’s body for anatomical study is a noble choice. It reflects a spirit of generosity, compassion, and a profound commitment for the greater good. These remarkable individuals recognized the power of education and significance of empowering medical professionals of tomorrow.

As physical therapists, we are required to be experts on the musculoskeletal system. The foundation of that expertise lies in anatomy. However, learning and attempting to master anatomy is not an easy feat. To be honest, it has been one of the most difficult endeavors on my academic journey so far. It felt like yesterday, my classmates and I were hovered over our donors trying to decipher the cords of the brachial plexus. And it’s just that. My classmates and I gained an understanding of anatomy that we would’ve never garnished if we had just been studying from 2D images on Netter’s Atlas.

But it’s not just the anatomical knowledge they have bestowed upon us; it’s also the compassion and empathy they have instilled in us, who have had the privilege of learning from them. Through their silent sacrifice, they have inspired us to approach our work with reverence, humility, and a deep understanding of the opportunity we have, to care for the human body and the lives it houses.

Let us remember that the legacy of these individuals who have donated their bodies to advance medical knowledge is not confined to the pages of medical textbooks or the corridors of our anatomy lab. It lives on in the countless patients who receive our service and care, the inspiration they have fueled within us to continue reaching for excellence, and in the hope for a future where medical science continues to advance, where diseases are conquered, and suffering is alleviated.

On behalf of the Department of Physical Therapy, thank you to you all and thank you to your loved ones who gave a gift and left a legacy that will truly last a lifetime.