

Good afternoon, my name is Michael DeMoss and I am honored to speak to you on behalf of the Nurse Anesthesia Program here at the University of Iowa. We are gathered here today to commemorate and celebrate the lives of your loved ones and express our upmost gratitude for their selfless gift.

As future anesthetists, it is our duty to understand how the human body works and how it is put together. As you might imagine, this is done by a lot of reading within the textbook, note taking, and everybody's favorite, testing. This works to create a good foundation of knowledge about the human body, but you can't appreciate the elegance of the human body in a textbook. The anatomy lab is an invaluable opportunity to see this elegance first hand and make connections you otherwise wouldn't have. You would think that such an invaluable experience would warrant some excitement, but in fact, when entering the lab for the first time, I felt uneasy. Looking around at my other classmates, I could tell I wasn't the only one. We are all former ICU nurses and had seen it all before, and believe me, I mean literally everything; so why were we feeling uneasy? It is because working in the ICU taught us the value of life. Day in and day out we would experience the highs and lows of life with our patients and their families. This could range from celebrating first steps after surgery and holding a patient's hand through a procedure, to having to look families in the eyes and telling them we had done all we could, but we were unable to save their loved one. These are just a few of many experiences that help to create a profound and indescribable bond between a nurse and their patients. So, when we enter the lab and remove the cover over our donor, we don't see a body. We see a person with a lifetime of experiences and relationships. This was somebody's mother, brother, father, or friend and they have entrusted us with a valuable gift. So, before we began our studies in our first day in the lab, I remember our teacher Kathy Andersen coming to my table. Radiating with excitement, she told

us that the anatomy lab was her *church*. At this point, I thought for sure that the formaldehyde had gotten to her. She went on to explain how incredible the anatomy of our donors is, and how it was going to benefit our future practice working with patients. Additionally, she told us that each day in the lab, we were going to learn more and more about our donors, and that each session is going to give us a better idea of who they are. When we get assigned a donor, we don't know much about them. All we are told is their age and cause of death. Although it is speculative, I'd like to think that we got to know our donors over the course of our time in the anatomy lab. One lab session we would maybe find arthritis in the knee joints, perhaps this person loved to run. Another session we may find callused hands, perhaps this person was a carpenter and loved to build things for their family. Another session we may find some scarring of the liver, perhaps this person was a die-hard Hawkeye fan and never missed a single tailgate. Sometimes you would find cancerous tumors spread across the body, this person was a fighter who was surrounded by a support system of loved ones. Creating this story and bond with our donors over the course of our time in the anatomy lab made it difficult to leave. These people were no longer strangers, but now they had become some of our most valuable teachers. By the end of our time in the anatomy lab we all felt comfortable locating and identifying different nerves of the brachial plexus. In the future, we will block these nerves to absolve our patients of pain. We are now comfortable with the anatomy of the airway. Anatomy we will have to be able to understand and manipulate to provide life-saving breaths to our future patients. We understand the anatomy of the of the spinal column. Anatomy we will have to use to guide our needles to provide epidurals and spinal anesthesia. As we move on into clinical practice, I can say with confidence, that when we are working with patients we will not be thinking about pictures or

writing in the textbook. Instead we will be thinking about the anatomy of our donors and all the great lessons they've taught us.

Our donors embody what all healthcare providers strive to be. They are selfless. They gave a group of strangers the last thing they had to give in this world, in hopes to improve their education and therefore change the lives of many. I find it inspirational that somebody who can have virtually no medical education, can have such a profound effect on the health of future patients. They aren't pursuing fame or fortune. There is no money in becoming a donor and your name won't be read in the headlines of the news. Our donors are nameless heroes. They believe in the highest level of education for providers because they understand that high fidelity simulations yield high quality results. Without their gift, we wouldn't understand how to do a variety of anesthetic techniques that can both eliminate pain for our patients, but also bring life into this world. I would also like to take a moment to thank the friends and family here in the audience today. We've seen firsthand the strain sickness can put on patients and their families. We thank you for your love, support, and guidance throughout the lives of our donors. We know that you've had to put your grieving process on hold until today, and we are extremely grateful for that. While we know they will always be with you, we want you to know that part of them will also be there with us. They will help guide our hand and our decision making to change the lives of thousands of patients during our career as providers. Since finishing in the anatomy lab, I have reflected on my experience and asked, "What did we do to deserve this incredible gift?". The answer I've come up with is it's not what we have done, but rather, what we will do in the many years to come. Thank you.

