

IFAA / FICEM Statement on the Presence of Plastination Vendors at Conferences

In recent decades companies displaying and marketing plastinated human tissues have been present at many international anatomy and healthcare education conferences. This practice has generated some concerns within the anatomy profession. Primary reasons for objections to this practice include the commercial nature of the company business models that result in commodification of the human body, and the operational ethical standards of plastination companies which have in some instances have not met standards deemed reasonable by anatomists. Further ethical questions include questions around appropriate levels of donor consent, operational transparency, issues around international transfer of body parts, and the appropriate disposition of plastinated human remains.

It is the view of FICEM that plastination companies should not have a presence at anatomy and healthcare education conferences given their commercial model contradicts a fundamental principle of the IFAA Recommendations of Good Practice for Body Donation: that of ‘no commercialisation’ of the human body. This position broadly aligns with international laws and regulations around the sale of human tissue, which is generally prohibited.

FICEM understands that in many jurisdictions it is not illegal to market or sell plastinated human tissues and that some conference organisers may include plastination companies as vendors at anatomy or healthcare education conferences. Where this occurs, FICEM recommends the following actions to help raise awareness of ethical concerns relating to this practice and to facilitate high standards of ethical behavior amongst both the anatomy community and plastinate vendors.

1. Display of Human Plastinates: It should be ensured that plastination displays are not able to be viewed by the general public who would not be aware of the context of such displays, that body parts such as faces and genitalia are not displayed, and that personal identifiers such as serial numbers or bodily markings are not visible. These actions assist the maintenance of dignity for the donors.

2. Conference Organiser Engagement with Plastination Companies: Conference organisers should engage with plastination companies to ensure transparency around the origins of any plastinates. This will help ensure legal obligations are met, and will assist in raising awareness around ethical concerns and contemporary ethical standards associated with the practice of body donation and subsequent plastination. These conversations should include:

- a. Organisers should request examples of blank donor consent forms and information regarding consent processes as part of due diligence around ensuring adherence to any legal obligations and to assist their understanding of the donor’s consent. This includes appropriate levels of consent for the donor remains being used for commercial purposes, whether international transfer was consented to, and how disposition is managed (e.g., returned to family, or how disposition occurs).
- b. Displaying examples of blank donor consent forms at plastination booths should be considered. This would inform potential purchasers and conference attendees to better understand vendor consent practices, helping provide and promote transparency around these processes.