

The Autopsy in Medical Education

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There is no doubt that autopsy is a positive learning experience which helps advance different learning styles and maximize all dimensions such as cognitive, emotional, societal and general aspects (McNamee, et al., 2009). The autopsy experience enables harnessing of factors that influence covert learning which is beyond the control of teachers, such as prior learning, life experience, cultural or religious beliefs, interests and psychological predispositions (Bamba & Quince, 2015).

Studies conducted in two Sri Lankan medical faculties revealed that in circumstances where Forensic Medicine is taught as an undergraduate subject. Medical student consider the medico-legal autopsy as a positive learning experience due to its visual and emotional nature. Although the primary aim of these autopsies was to teach forensic medicine, most students found it helpful in learning anatomy and for clinical and pathological correlation. The fact that a significant proportion claimed that exposure to autopsy made them mentally and emotionally stronger and the fact that a significant proportion still felt uncomfortable due to blood, smell and dissection during the process further highlights the need for more autopsy exposure.

The lack of empathy or the neutral attitude of a significant proportion of students towards the deceased and the next of kin highlights an important aspect that is being neglected during this teaching learning experience.

It is imperative that the emotional aspect of this process be emphasized by teachers not only to enhance the learning experience but also to develop skills such as empathy, communication, breaking bad news etc. This may be achieved by increasing exposure to autopsy, allowing students to assist at autopsy and drawing attention of students to the emotional aspect during the experience.

Medical students considered autopsy as a positive learning experience with majority agreeing that they should witness and assist at autopsies (McNamee, et al., 2009). However only a minority would like to perform autopsies as medical officers and would consent to an autopsy of a friend/relative. It is necessary to explore reasons for this reluctance in order to create an environment where autopsies maybe performed freely which would not only bring closure to the relatives and ensure justice but would also help in the advancement of the discipline and ensure justice.

References

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