

ATTITUDES AND REACTIONS OF PRECLINICAL MEDICAL AND DENTAL STUDENTS TO DISSECTIONS

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The rapid expansion in medical knowledge such as new scientific information and the introduction of new technology in operative and diagnostic medicine during the last several decades, has created pressure to reduce the time spent in basic sciences, especially the detailed learning of anatomy. There is much debate over the years on the value of traditional detailed dissection of the cadavers. Today, there is a world wide move of anatomy based teaching from dissection to prosection. Some reports suggest that working with cadavers whether through active dissection or by examination of prosected specimen is a stressful experience.

The present study was conducted with the aim of identifying the attitudes and reactions of preclinical medical and dental students towards cadaver dissection. A questionnaire was distributed amongst 353 first year medical (187) and dental (166) students during two consecutive years.

Majority of students (total 61%) found the prospect of their first entry to the dissecting room interesting and exciting while the others expressed a negative attitude. However this initial negative reaction improved significantly 15 weeks later. The most frequent physical symptoms experienced were a temporary loss of appetite (total 20%), recurring visual images (total 10%) and nausea (total 10%). A fear of infection was expressed by 3% of respondents. Most students (total 59%) suffered very little or no stress on their first visit to the dissecting room while only 4% rated their stress levels as high. Although 96% had seen a dead body previously, for a 4% of respondents entry to the dissecting room was the first encounter with a dead person. However, prior exposure to a dead body was not a safeguard against the reactions caused by dissection. Fifty three percent suggested that there should be more pre-dissection preparation before the commencement of the anatomy course to overcome these reactions. Chi-square tests revealed significant gender differences ($p < 0.05$) concerning most aspects of reactions to human cadaver dissection. Female students showed higher levels of fear and stress, and reported stronger physical and behavioural reactions.

Both medical (96%) and dental (99%) students stated that dissections help a lot in learning human gross anatomy. They suggested prosected specimens and computer aided learning as other methods of value in learning anatomy.

In this study, a majority of students expressed a positive attitude towards cadaver dissections. Neutral and positive attitudes later supervened among the respondents who expressed an initial negative reaction.