

Does Cadaveric Oath Influence the Mind-Set of the First Year Medical Students? A Study in Andhra Pradesh, India

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Abstract

Background: Cadaveric oath is a pledge taken by the first year MBBS students on the first day of their anatomy dissection to pay respects to the human remains which remain as their mentor throughout their course. The objective of the study is to assess the influence of the cadaveric oath on the first MBBS students.

Materials and Methods: This study would be conducted in the Department of Anatomy, KIMS and RF, Amalapuram after obtaining IEC (Institutional Ethical Committee) clearance. Data is collected by using predesigned semistructured questionnaire from all first year medical students using google forms.

Results: The mean score for question “ 5. You should have respect and sense of gratitude to people who donated their bodies.” is very high (4.89 ± 0.44) and is strongly agreed by 93.3 % of the students. Only 30 % out of 150 students strongly agreed that cadaveric oath motivates them to donate their body for dissection and the mean score is 3.51 ± 1.25 .

Conclusion: The study proved there is a positive impact of cadaveric oath on the first MBBS students which helps them inculcate the respect and dignity towards their mentor and also helps them in future practice to maintain good doctor–patient relationship.

Keywords: Cadaveric Oath, Medical Students, Anatomy Dissection, Medical Education.

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Introduction

Dissection hall is the entry to medical profession for new medical students Thus, nurturing them with professionalism aspects must be considered. Typically, cadaveric dissection lead to direct perception and deep learning of structure of the human body that itself is a

fundamental for disease understanding and physical exams but attention to the ethical, human and emotional aspects of it often to be missed. Dignity and respect to cadavers emphasizes human aspects and therefore, this opportunity should be used to develop ethical attitudes, empathy, compassion and

philanthropy benefitted. A cadaver belongs to person that donated it to improve medical education and community health. So, students must respect the generosity and mercy and honor the cadavers as the first patient and silent teachers. Holding formal ceremony such as cadaveric oath at the beginning of course or memorial celebrating and commemorating at the end of the academic year in addition to use teaching and evaluation methods of professionalism during course is recommended to promote professionalism and medical ethics. [1]

Cadaveric dissection is indispensable for anatomy learning. The student-cadaver relationship stabilized on humanities can serve as a simulation for future doctor-patient relationship. Hence, bioethics is introduced in the medical curriculum. To achieve the goal of professionalism, cadaveric oath should be conducted on the first day of anatomy dissection, so that medical students can imbibe values like respect, gratitude, compassion, care and dignity towards their first teacher. [2]

A Cadaveric Oath is a pledge which the students recite on the opening day of Anatomy learning, to pay tributes to the soul, to respect the dignity and integrity of the human remains that they are about to work on. The practice of students taking an oath prior to dissecting cadavers is essential in anatomy learning and unique aspect of medical curriculum. [3]

This is an innovative idea to imbibe the importance of their first teacher and first patient in the form of a cadaver. This approach will allow students to implement and practice humanistic and ethical values indispensable for laying a foundation for their clinical training and adequate future professional practice of medicine.

The objectives of the study are to assess the influence of cadaveric oath on perceptions of students towards cadaver donors and sensitize the first year medical

students about ethical approach towards the cadaver.

Materials and Methods

Source of data: First year medical students (2021 admitted batch) from KIMS and RF, Amalapuram. Method of collection of data: Data is collected by using predesigned semi structured questionnaire from all first year medical students using google forms.

Study setting: This study was conducted in the Department of Anatomy, KIMS and RF, Amalapuram after obtaining IEC (Institutional Ethical Committee) clearance. Interactive lecture about the ethical approach towards cadaver was delivered on the first day of anatomy dissection and all the first year medical students were sensitized how to respect the cadaver after that they were given cadaveric oath by the faculty. The same was reinforced during conduct of AETCOM session 1.5 module "Cadaver as first teacher". Written consent was obtained from 150 students of first MBBS who participated in the study. Questionnaire about the perceptions of cadaveric oath event was given to students. Students marked their responses according to the 5 point Likert scale. With the help of questionnaire required information was collected. The study did not require any investigations or interventions to be conducted on any human participants.

Inclusion Criteria: First year MBBS students who were willing to participate.

Exclusion Criteria: Students who did not give consent.

Study Duration: One month from approval from the IEC.

Ethical Issues: Informed consent and confidentiality of data had been ensured. There are no issues of beneficence and maleficence.

Statistical Analysis: Data obtained through online Google forms was populated into Microsoft excel sheet.

Results

The total of 150 first year medical students

participated in the survey and gave their opinions on a 5 – point Likert scale, Out of the 150 students, 87 were female students and 63 were male students. Mean age of the students was 19.07 ± 1.78 .

Table 1: Demographic Data

Demographic Variable	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	63	42
	Female	87	58
Age	Mean \pm S.D.	19.07 \pm 1.78	

Table-2: Means of Questionnaire

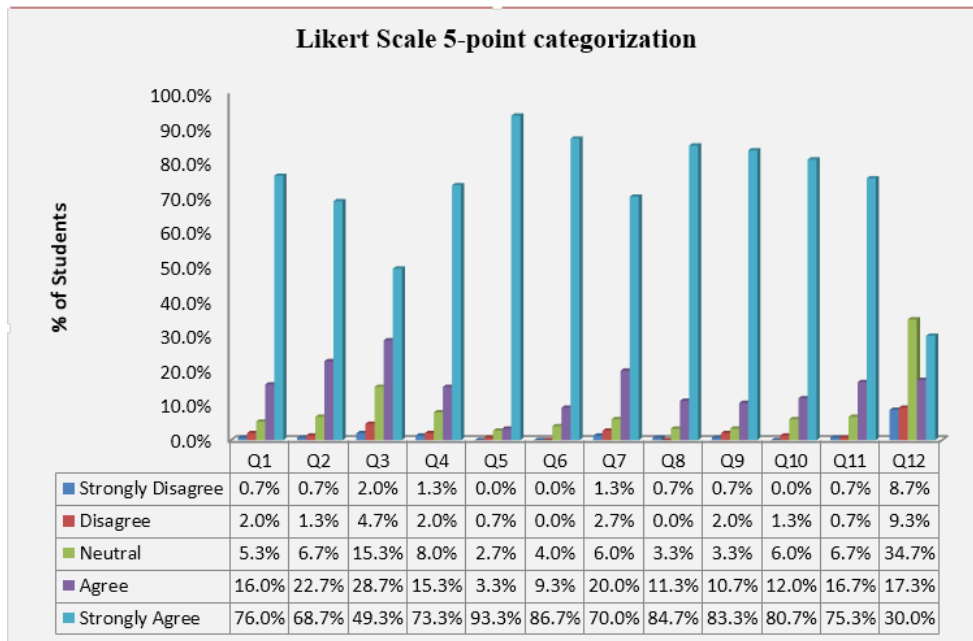
Questionnaire	Mean \pm S.D.	Strongly Agreed Students	
		Frequency	Percentage
1. There is importance of cadaveric oath in anatomy learning	4.65 \pm 0.73	114	76.00
2. It is a unique and essential aspect of the medical curriculum	4.57 \pm 0.74	103	68.70
3. Cadaveric oath helps you to overcome your inhibitions	4.19 \pm 0.99	74	49.30
4. Cadaveric oath event is heart touching and empathetic	4.57 \pm 0.83	110	73.30
5. You should have respect and sense of gratitude to people who donated their bodies.	4.89 \pm 0.44	140	93.30
6. You should be thankful to the family members for their noble gesture of donating body for medical teaching and research.	4.83 \pm 0.47	130	86.70
7. After cadaveric oath you are enlightened about the importance of once lived bodies	4.55 \pm 0.83	105	70.00
8. Cadaver should be treated with respect, compassion, care and dignity	4.79 \pm 0.56	127	84.70
9. You accept the fact that cadavers are your silent mentors	4.74 \pm 0.68	125	83.30
10. Cadaveric oath should be continued for future undergraduate medical students	4.72 \pm 0.64	121	80.70
11. There should be awareness about bioethical education (ethics of medical and biological research) among medical students	4.65 \pm 0.69	113	75.30
12. Cadaveric oath motivates you to donate your body for dissection	3.51 \pm 1.25	45	30.00

The mean score for each question in the questionnaire is given in the table no. 2. The mean score for question “ 5. You should have respect and sense of gratitude to people who donated their bodies.” is very high (4.89 ± 0.44) and is strongly

agreed by 93.3 % of the students .Only 30 % out of 150 students strongly agreed that cadaveric oath motivates them to donate their body for dissection and the mean score is 3.51 ± 1.25 .No student disagreed for the question “6. You should be thankful

to the family members for their noble gesture of donating body for medical teaching and research.” And 86.7% students strongly agreed for their noble

gesture.76 % students strongly agreed that there is importance of cadaveric oath in anatomy learning.



Graph 1: Likert Scale 5-point categorization

Discussion

Students need to be guided so as to not make any loose references or casual remarks with regards to the mortal remains of the donor at any point of time [4]. They are also required to maintain the same decorum with regards to the donor while they are interacting with their family members/relatives/friends/general public [5]. This ethical aspect mandates strict compliance throughout the duration of the human dissection course. Adherence to this ethical practice may possibly shape their outlook towards the patients and the society in general. Mutual respect is an integral element of physician-patient relationship and is the cornerstone of ethical medical practice. In maintaining a respectful attitude towards the human remains of the donor, a student not only uplifts his own moral standard but also projects a better reflection of oneself within the society in general. [6]

In the present study, 76% students strongly agreed that there is importance of

cadaveric oath in anatomy learning. To improve the doctor-patient relationship, the National Medical Council of India has introduced bioethics in the medical curriculum to train medical undergraduates from the first day of their entry into medical college. [7]

Learning bioethics is a significant way to learn medical professionalism, and it must be initiated in the dissection hall itself. The dissection of bodies will help the medical students gain knowledge through observation, identification, and palpation of various structures in the body. The spatial and tactile nature of the body may help students differentiate the normal and anatomical variations that occur in the human body. [8]

84.7% students strongly agreed that cadaver should be treated with respect, compassion, care and dignity. 93.3% students strongly agreed that you should have respect and sense of gratitude to people who donated their bodies. Biological systems are complex and extensive. The deeper a student reads and

discusses, the more the student learns. Human bodies are required to study the gross anatomy of human structures. A deceased human is the first thing a medical student learns about knowledge, conduct, and altruistic behavior. As a result, these deceased individuals need to be held in the highest respect and regarded as medical students' first patients. In spite of various mixed emotions towards desecration, dismemberment, dehumanization, etc., medical students should have moral respect for the bodies while handling them. [3,9,10]

Halpern J commented that students should be sensitized so that they can develop an emotional attachment with the cadaver which can help them to understand the psychosocial factors contributing to a patient's illness. [11] Andrea Oxley da Rocha et al in their study remarked that empathy is an essential attitude for future medical professionals enabling them to provide more humanistic medical care. [12]

Then respect may develop towards patients in the future. The deceased individual is possessed by a person who chose to donate his or her body in order to give back to society. Students must acknowledge these donors' kindness and compassion in having given their bodies as passive mentors in the medical college.

Conclusions

Anatomy is an important subject in the medical curriculum where we learn the structural aspects of the human body from cadavers. They should be treated with care, respect and compassion, the students should treat the cadavers with respect and dignity and should not leave any loose references and consider the cadaver to be their mentor throughout their curriculum. It is possible to gain knowledge only with these bioethical principles given by the National Medical Commission and the cadaveric oath helps in inculcating this behaviour in the students from first year

which helps them flourish in their future practice also.

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