Acknowledgement in cadaver studies: Are we paying due respect?

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“THEIR DEATHS BEAR THE HONORABLENESS OF BEING ALTRUISTIC HELP FOR THE LIVING”

Professor Walter Thiel (1)

“ALIVE WE THOUGHT BEYOND OUR LIVES TO GIVE OUR BODIES AS A GIFT FOR YOU TO READ”

Marble plaque by artist Tom Philips at Cardiff University Dissecting room (1)

Medical education revolves around the basic sciences and human anatomy is considered as a key fundamental subject in preparing a medical student towards being an efficient physician.

Learning anatomy through human cadaveric dissections and specimens has played an important role since our forefathers and we, the current anatomists have far more access to cadaveric specimens than them as at present people are grateful to donate their bodies for the sake of science and medical education. Then the question arises; Are we feeling grateful towards them? Are we giving them the due respect and the necessary recognition?

Although most institutions hold memorial services for those who have donated their bodies for betterment medical education and anatomical research, their selfless attempt is not being recognized or acknowledgement.

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required by most of the anatomical conferences or specialty clinical and basic science journals/publishers and most authors/research papers omit this part (2,3).

The advancements of science occur through anatomical research benefit the individuals of the donors’ society. Therefore, it is necessary to build a healthy relationship between the anatomists and society (4,5). Usually, the donor is acknowledged while living or after death in the form of a certificate with or without their photograph. For this purpose, most institutions with their medical students conduct memorial services and thanksgiving ceremonies, which is a way of showing gratitude and a good practice (1,4,5).

Not every researcher is keen to obtain ethical approval from relevant institutions or local ethical committees to conduct anatomical research or acknowledge the donor-cadavers. But the trend to acknowledge the donor-cadaver-patients in the articles publication is on positive side since 2013 based on Benninger’s proposal on formal acknowledgement of donor-cadaver-patients. This is supported by some publishers and journals as they now request to acknowledge the cadavers used for the research (whether it is donor or not) from all submissions. But without the journal pressure, if an author includes an acknowledgement for the donor-cadaver in their article, that will reflect their true intention and heartfelt gratitude towards the donor-cadavers (4).

The Anatomical Quality Assurance (AQUA) checklist, developed by Tomaszewski K. A. et al (2016), the its primary aim was to strengthen the structured reporting style of original anatomical studies, also includes a checkbox (Item 27) for acknowledgement where the author acknowledges individual(s), institution(s) or third parties who significantly contributed to the study. Here, donor-cadaver-patients should be included under “individual(s)” category (6).

In 2018 consensus guidelines for uniform reporting of ethics in anatomy research were established based on the AQUA checklist. The guideline strongly recommends that authors acknowledge the donor-cadavers in the acknowledgement section (AQUA Item 27) (7).

To standardize and encourage the researchers on using proper acknowledgement towards donor-cadavers in their publications, some authors have suggested the following. “The author(s) would like to recognize those who graciously donated themselves to enable this research” (2). “The authors sincerely thank those who donated their bodies to science so that anatomical research could be performed. Results from such research can potentially increase mankind’s overall knowledge that can then improve patient care. Therefore, these donors and their families deserve our highest gratitude” (3).

Iwanaga et al., recommend an acknowledgement section that will follow the conclusion, and this is to be applied to any research using donor-cadavers/cadaveric tissues. Gratitude should be expressed both toward the donor-cadaver and their family members.
The current leaders of anatomical societies are providing guidance to take the anatomical research into a new arena and help to uplift the quality of the studies, journals, and publications by way of creating checklists, formulating guidelines, and nurturing discussions on ethical backgrounds of anatomical research. It is our duty to learn and practice then to educate and encourage young researchers and students to acknowledge donor-cadavers and their families not only in memorial services but also in their publications which include both journal articles and conference presentations.

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References


