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Anatomy Training in Nigeria and Lack of Bequests

Francis Adelade GO, Fakoya

Adjunct Research Professor and Neuroteratologist, Nigerian Institute of Medical Research, Yaba, Lagos Nigeria

Corresponding Author: Francis Adelade G.O. Fakoya

E-mail: ffakoya@outlook.com;

SHORT COMMUNICATION

A Perspective

Anatomy is one of the oldest disciplines in the world and an essential component of all the professional degrees, including Medicine, Dentistry Nursing, Pharmacy, and Physiotherapy. Undoubtedly undergraduate anatomy education is on the decline globally^[1-3] albeit, more in the developed countries than in most developing countries that still heavily depend on cadaveric dissections.^[4-6] Cadaveric dissection remains the method of choice for teaching human anatomy^[7-12] because it has withstood the test of time,^[1,4,13,14] impacts positively on the majority of medical students who had attested that dissection fosters teamwork, provides them with a foundation critical to development of clinical skills, aids with their professional development, as it helps to build discipline and independent skills that are essential requirements of modern health care setup. It also helps them come to terms with death and dying.^[5,6] However, the acquisition of cadavers, the material to be dissected, leaves a gap in the moral fabric of the principles and practice of Anatomy as a discipline and profession.

With continued improved public awareness, engagement and inquisition into the events and activities of higher education in developing countries through public-private partnership (PPP) and other approaches as a means for sustainable development, addressing social disadvantages and exclusion to promote the idea of a fair society,^[15] it is imperative that anatomists and anatomical societies in developing countries assumes responsibility to advocate and demonstrate transparency on the various ethical, moral and legal factors that influence and surround the acquisition of the cadavers used in Anatomy training, at every level of Anatomical sciences.

This calls for reciprocal reflection by those directly concerned with the principles and practice of Anatomy as a profession and discipline. Reflecting on teaching is commonly cited as a fundamental practice for personal

and professional development.^[16] Educational research into the scholarship of teaching and learning anatomy includes engaging in discipline specific literature on teaching, reflecting on individual teaching methods and communicating these findings to peers.^[16] This approach, should be encouraged for all Anatomy Educators in Nigeria,^[17] to reflect on the state of anatomical knowledge at their respective institutions, including but not limited to anatomy teaching and student's learning, delivery mode, knowledge, potential educational developments and general thoughts on the teaching of anatomy to medical and biomedical students as part of the recent determination to reposition Anatomy Education in Nigeria.

There is an ethical requirement for obtaining cadavers through the development of body donation programs.^[7] This approach, on the surface, would be viewed as creating an encumbrance in the process of acquiring human bodies, making it more strenuous for institutions, since most if not all Departments of Anatomical Sciences in Nigeria depend on unclaimed bodies.^[18-20] Yet, the engagement of the local communities, policy makers and other stakeholders will on the long run enhance, support and give credence to the process, the program – teaching and research – which will aid the ROI between the Institutions and the society.

The International Federation of Associations of Anatomists (IFAA) recommended in 2012 that only donated bodies be used for anatomy teaching and research^[21] and in recent years is facilitating recommendations on Core Syllabi for teaching of anatomy and its components.^[22-29] It is high time the Anatomical Society of Nigeria initiates round-table discussions amongst Senior Anatomy Leaders, Heads of Departments, to cultivate and channel its position on this issue, while engaging Institutional authorities on the most reasonable cost-effective modality to achieve this purpose. It will be credible and an achieved goal for ASN to be counted amongst IFAA members in compliance

with this important objective. While it is a fact that in many countries around the world, anatomists still depend on bodies that do not stem from voluntary donations by the deceased but, rather, are "unclaimed,"^[21] this is less than ideal. It is reasonable to opine that the resource of unclaimed bodies will dry out soon as the public becomes generally better informed in this jet age of the social media, even in a developing country. The intent is to prevent a potential epic ethical scandal regarding the sourcing and use of unclaimed bodies. The future will need human bodies to ensure optimal pre- and post-graduate training and for use in biomedical research. An act of body donation guided by laws and ethical frameworks would further strengthen the "Anatomy Bill" being advocated alongside the needs for medical knowledge and for improved teaching of human anatomy. A proposal for introducing a requirement to declare the provenience of cadavers in anatomy publications^[30-32] is up for consideration. This could have an impact on the efforts of Anatomists from developing countries to publish their results in reputable journals of anatomical sciences as well as could 'quarantine' the Journal of the ASN, where its position is undeclared on the subject matter, when this proposal becomes implemented, in a similar nature to the reporting of animals used in research, teaching or testing (ARRIVE Guidelines).^[33-39]

Implementation of the IFAA recommendations still has a long way to go. However, even with ethical constraints, it is possible to transition from the use of mainly unclaimed bodies to the acquisition of bequeathed/donor bodies. It is encouraging that functioning body donation programs are growing on the continent and that there are examples of recent rises in donations and of anatomists initiating new donation programs.^[40-41] The approach would ensure better public engagement by the departments of Anatomy in the country, who should consider promoting public enlightenment through activities such as Open days, Bequeathal public seminars, engaging students on professionalism and respect for the cadavers they dissect as their first "patients" as well as promote participation of the lay community at the Association level in the ethical process of body donations programmes.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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