

Post Anatomy Course Meeting

Outline of speaker presentation:

The speaker for this meeting might consider addressing him or herself to the topic of the dualism and cognitive dissonance experienced in anatomy. Aside from the cognitive dissonance experienced in the anatomy lab, many physicians find that precisely this same question arises in the practice of medicine. This introductory paragraph is almost verbatim of the one provided at the opening session dealing with the anatomy course. The hope is that the same speaker will share his or her thoughts both at the start and at the conclusion of the course to provide those in attendance with a more global perspective on the anatomy course.

The hope is that whoever speaks can reflect on his/her opening story about a time where he/she was confronted with this dualism, and recognized the impulse to see the patient as their pathology, and as more of an anatomical structure than a human. Indeed, now that students have gone through anatomy, they too have found themselves in a similar situation and together can discuss how to deal with this in future situations.

From there, as with the opening session, a retrospective discussion can take place in which those in attendance examine the seeds of that dissonance in their own anatomy lab, and how that has shaped their approach to medicine. Is it necessary sometimes? How do you walk that line? How can we, having just emerged from anatomy lab, process it in a way that recognizes both the value and danger of an experience like that? Basically, there is dualism that starts in the lab where the student is forced to objectify the donor/cadaver to do his/her work and to pass the course. The question is did we recognize that happening, can we do anything about it, and does it extend to other areas in medicine?

Some helpful facilitating questions:

1. Open ended questions:
 - a. How was the experience of taking anatomy?
 - b. What could we/you/the school have done to make the course “better”?
What does better mean for you/your class/your cadavers?
 - c. Did the course change you in any way? If so, how?
 - d. Is there an “invisible curriculum” in medical school? In anatomy? If so, what is it?
2. More specific:
 - a. Would you have donated your body before the course? Would you donate your body after the course? What if a family member wanted to donate their body- what would you tell them? Explain.
 - b. What would the curriculum look like if it was focused on patients as opposed to science?
 - c. Is there such a thing as dignity after death? Is it owed to the donor? If so, what is the origin of that dignity?

- d. Would you take anatomy again (ex. As an elective? As a peer tutor? As a physician? Etc.) If so, what would you tell yourself before you took the course? What would you do differently? What would be the same?