



CADAVERIC OATH AND ITS RELEVANCE IN ANATOMY

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Article Info

Received 15/01/2016

Revised 27/02/2016

Accepted 12/03/2016

Key words:

Physicians, Medical Students, Patients, Doctor-Patient Relationship, Bioethics, Cadaveric Oath, First Teacher.

ABSTRACT

Today in the age of technology and cost management, the traditional doctor-patient relationship is eroding. The attainment of the best professional principles, attitudes, expertise, and conduct, during the transformation of a medical student to a practitioner, begins on the first day of medical college and continues throughout. The need of the hour is to retain the best elements of a doctor-patient relationship, and teach it to medical students. This training must be started as soon as a student enters medical college. Hence a subject called as 'bioethics' has now been introduced into the curriculum. Bioethics education is the best way to achieve the goal of professionalism and it must start in the dissection hall for medical students by taking a 'cadaveric oath'. Cadavers are to be held in high esteem and are to be regarded as not only the 'first patient' but also the 'first teacher' of a medical student. Conclusion: This paper discusses the current challenges faced by medical professionals and emphasizes the relevance of a 'cadaveric oath' as a part of bioethics in today's age of advanced medical technology. The paper also elaborates the contents of a 'cadaveric oath' and the right method of administering it.

INTRODUCTION

A physician-patient interaction is guided by a 'golden rule' - "do unto others as you would have them do unto you and your family." There should be respect for the patient's dignity, privacy and confidentiality. Physicians and medical students must demonstrate sensitivity, respect, compassion, emotional support, and empathy at all times—to patients and their families. This doctor-patient relationship defines the uniqueness of the medical profession. Nothing is more satisfying than to "help" a patient and receive their heartfelt thanks. But today in this age of technology and cost management, the traditional doctor-patient relationship is eroding. There is a lack of trust between patients' families and doctors. There is an increasing expectation from patients that, with modern medicine and technology, a doctor should be able to guarantee a good outcome. When the desired outcome is not achieved, there are attacks on doctors and other medical staff, by angry friends and relatives of patients.

The perception is that, any adverse outcome is due to the doctor's negligence. [1]

The attainment of the best professional principles, attitudes, expertise, and conduct, during this transformation, begins on the first day of medical college and continues throughout. Hence the academic environment of a medical college, must try to positively direct a medical students' professional growth and create an environment which helps in cultivating professional values. [2]

The need of the hour is to retain the best elements of a doctor-patient relationship, and teach it to medical student. This training must be started as soon as a student enters medical college. Hence we have been introduced to a new subject called 'Bioethics'. [3]

Anatomy is one of the basic medical science disciplines in the medical undergraduate curriculum which a student encounters as soon as he enters the medical



college. Without studying human anatomy in totality, medicine is meaningless. Cadavers are required for studying human anatomy in all disciplines of medical science. Gaining insight and appreciation of the structure of the human body, is a deep profound learning experience for a student. At the outset of the medical curriculum, it is a cadaver which imparts professional principles, knowledge, conduct and altruistic behaviour to a medical student. Hence cadavers are to be held in high esteem and regarded as the first patient of a medical student. Human structures are complicated and vast. The more a student reads and dissects, the more knowledge he gains. [4]

A fundamental component of professionalism is altruism; which is learnt from a cadaveric donor. It emphasizes the humanistic side of medicine and is meant to inculcate in students, the ethos that will, guide them into becoming professional, caring and compassionate doctors. The cadaver belongs to a person who decided to donate his body to make a contribution to society. Students must recognize the generosity of these donors in bequeathing their bodies as ‘silent mentors’ for medical education. Thus to appreciate this altruistic behaviour of a cadaveric donor, taking a ‘cadaveric oath’ becomes an essential part of Bioethics. [5]

Cadaveric Oath

An oath is a public statement or promise to behave or not to behave in certain ways.

A ‘Cadaveric Oath’ is a pledge which the students recite on the opening day of Anatomy learning, to respect the dignity and integrity of the human remains that they are about to work on. On our first Anatomy day at K.J.

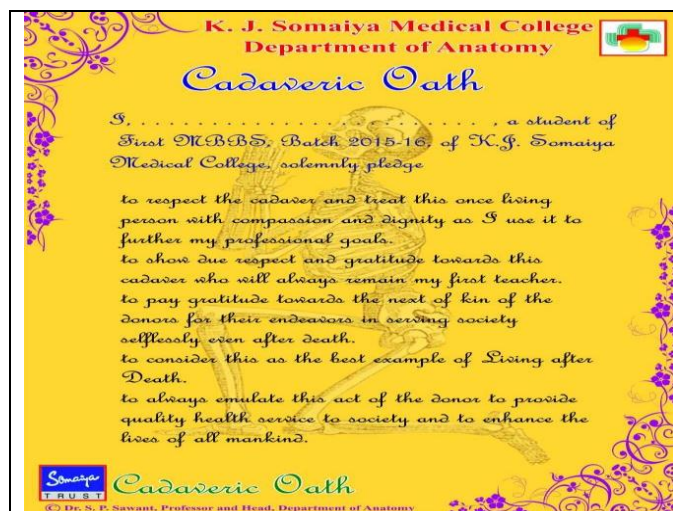
Somaiya Medical College, we were administered the ‘Cadaveric Oath’. This Oath taking was a very emotionally charged moment for us and it evoked speculations and fears regarding the concept of death and serious illness in us and our loved ones.

For the process of oath taking, we were made to stand around a cadaver, with the right hand lifted up and pointing in the direction of the cadaver. The left hand holding a copy of the oath. The oath ceremony was administered by the Head of the Department and presided over by the faculty of the department, the Dean of the institute and by a member of the Bioethics Committee.

Today looking back, I feel, taking a cadaveric oath was a good way to start the medical curriculum. It was inspiring and made us feel as a part of the scientific community. Oath taking helped all of us from diverse backgrounds to remember that no matter where we come from, we’re all in this together. [6]

The cadaveric oath enlightened us regarding the importance of these once-living bodies and how they should be treated with proper care and respect, and also the fact that Cadavers are our ‘silent mentors’. The aim of a cadaveric oath is to turn out caring, informative, and clinically better doctors who would accord each and every future patient, the dignity and respect deserved. Such doctors will also develop sensitively as they improve their knowledge and practical skills and will always consider the ‘human’ values inside the patient. [7].

The ‘Cadaveric Oath’ being administered by the Head of the Department, faculty of the department, the Dean of the institute and a member of the Bioethics Committee.



DISCUSSION

Ethics has today become a crucial part of learning and this message must permeate the educational environment. Regarding a cadaver, there are a number of moral and ethical debates nowadays. A dead person’s body has an intrinsic ethical value that requires a respectful attitude towards it. This ethical dilemma appears when an

invasive manipulation or performing a dissection on the cadaver is required.

Dissection of the human body represents a procedure during which the body is sectioned in order to study the topographical anatomy and the structure of its components [8].



Students should be made aware that these cadavers who are their 'silent mentors' were once alive and were people like them, with dreams, hopes, aspirations, disappointments and despair. Hence they should be treated just as the way a live person is treated, not only as a 'first teacher' but also as the 'first patient'; to treat the cadaver as a simple corpse would mean lowering the evaluation standards applied to the person alive.

When someone is donating their body after death, they are helping to train the next generation of doctors. "This is how good doctors get better. A person who donates his body willingly for the advancement of medical science has done so without anything to gain from it. The students don't know the name of the person they are dissecting, so in a sense it means that the person has given himself up for study without recognition. This is a quality which all medical students or would-be doctors should imbibe i.e. to 'give without recognition'. Hence, it is imperative that the memory of the deceased be respected. The painful and irreversible loss a family has suffered has also to be taken into account [9].

'Silent teachers' speak volumes. Cadavers used in anatomical teaching help health science students to understand not only the structural organization of the human body but also they help in learning clinical examinations, surgical procedures. They also prepare students for the study of pathology, so as to appreciate the basis of diseases.

Cadaveric oath also emphasizes to the students that they are their first patients. Just like every patient is different, every cadaver is also different just like patients. Here, students can appreciate three-dimensional anatomy and anatomical variations. They can have a tactile understanding of real human tissues like arteries, veins, nerves organs, bones. Imagine a surgeon performing a surgical procedure directly on a patient when he has never actually worked on a cadaver [10].

Dissection of a cadaver helps students to develop attitudes of ethics, compassion, and humanism which are indispensable in the medical profession. The aim of 'Cadaveric Oath' is to turn out caring, informative, and clinically better doctors who would accord each and every future patient, the dignity and respect deserved. As they improve their knowledge and practical skills, they will also develop sensitivity and will always consider the 'human' inside the patient. Imbibing values like respect,

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responsibility and gratitude can never be achieved using computer based tools or web based tools for learning anatomy. Lastly, a cadaveric Oath conveys to us an appreciation of mortality, first that of the cadaver and ultimately our own. Cadavers serve to constantly remind us about the impermanence of life [11].

Body donation and Bombay Anatomy Act

An Act to provide for supply of unclaimed bodies of deceased persons (for donation before death by a person of his body or any part thereof after his death) to hospitals and medical and teaching institutions (for therapeutic purposes or for medical education or research including anatomical examination and dissection)." Any person of sound mind, who is over 18 years of age can donate his or her body. The eligibility criteria is a natural cause of death which has to be certified by at least a MBBS doctor, having a valid registration number [12].

CONCLUSION

Bioethics education must start in the dissection hall for medical students by taking a cadaveric oath. A 'Cadaveric Oath' is a unique and essential aspect of the medical curriculum. Today we have learnt to respect not only the dead but also the living. We have understood that there is life even after death and will never forget the cadaver as our first teacher of anatomy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is thankful to Dean Dr. Geeta Niyogi Madam for her support and also thankful to the Head of Department Dr. Sawant and all staff members of Department of Anatomy. The author also acknowledges the immense help received from scholars whose articles are included as references in this paper.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

STATEMENT OF HUMAN AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

All procedures performed in human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.



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