CAME Voice/Voix

Teaching Anatomy in a Competency based curriculum

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Anatomy is a core content of every medical curriculum and the foundation for the basic clinical examination, medical imaging and surgery. Although no one questions the need for medical students to learn anatomy, the ways that different schools achieve this goal are diverse. Moreover, the amount of anatomy taught may be viewed by curriculum leaders as overwhelming or filled with minutiae, leading to cognitive overload, instead of a valuable learning opportunity for the junior medical student. The unfortunate casualty in this ongoing debate has been the hours spent by students in the human cadaver laboratory. The reason for this reduction in anatomy lab hours is the direct result of these labs being used solely to teach anatomy when this time could be used to also teach medical students other important roles and competencies that a physician needs.

For instance, the first encounter with the cadaver is a great way to teach **professionalism** by emphasizing a clear code of conduct in the anatomy lab, teaching students to respect the donor's body and to interact with the body and other students professionally at all times. Anatomy can also be used as an introduction to the **Humanities in medicine**. The rich tradition embodied by the **History** of Anatomical Sciences can be taught as a component of the History of medicine. Thoughtfully introducing students to the anatomy body donation program allows **empathy** to be integrated with the Anatomy laboratory; students realize the true nature of the precious gift that they have in their hands. And finally, small group teaching sessions in the anatomy lab are a stimulating way to educate students about **collaborative** learning. Students should be encouraged during these sessions to teach each other, promoting **scholarly** activity and encouraging the improvement of their **communication** skills. Active learning can be encouraged in the lab sessions by using videos for students to explore the general anatomy material before coming to the lab, and then, during the session students can review the clinical relevance of the structures and their correlation with digital imaging.

It would be a pity if the 21st-century medical curriculum loses its human anatomy laboratory to virtual dissection tables and digital 3D models, as the best anatomy teacher is not the professor but the dissected body lying on the anatomy table.