

1-2020

Assessing Student Opinion on Autopsy as a Supplement to Medical Education

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Recommended Citation

Wong, Wing Fei and Chan, MD, Joanna, "Assessing Student Opinion on Autopsy as a Supplement to Medical Education" (2020). *Phase 1*. Paper 2.
https://jdc.jefferson.edu/si_me_2022_phase1/2

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SKMC Class of 2022: SI/ME Abstract

Word count: 265

Assessing Student Opinion on Autopsy as a Supplement to Medical Education

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Purpose: Medical schools in the United States have decreased use of autopsy as a teaching tool in undergraduate medical education (UME). However, there are no recent data to understand how undergraduate medical students (UMS) value autopsies in their education, thus limiting suggestions for improving UME. This study aims to assess UMS opinion regarding autopsies as a supplement to their medical curriculum: is autopsy important and how?

Methods: This was a questionnaire study targeted to UMS at Sidney Kimmel Medical College. The questionnaire contained 51 closed- and open-ended questions (e.g. multiple choice, Likert scale, free response), and was distributed electronically. Data were collected and analyzed using RedCap.

Results and Conclusions: 103 respondents completed the survey: 84.5% (n=87) were preclinical medical students; 63.1% (n=65) identified as female, 34% (n=35) as male, and 2.9% (n=3) as gender non-conforming or preferred not to answer.

85.4% (n=88) respondents were interested in witnessing an autopsy. On Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree) questions, respondents were neutral in its importance in pathology thread (\bar{x} =3.66) and overall medical (\bar{x} =3.63) education. They agreed that witnessing an autopsy can improve anatomical knowledge (\bar{x} =4.27),

observational skills ($\bar{x}=4.1$), and clinico-pathological correlations ($\bar{x}=4.28$). Respondents agreed that it can also increase understanding of the role of pathologists ($\bar{x}=4.33$) and autopsy ($\bar{x}=4.25$) in patient care. However, 39.8% (n=41) reported “I don’t know” for UMS eligibility and 42.7% (n=44) reported “I don’t know” who to request permission.

Overall, the data suggest that UMS are interested in witnessing autopsies, believe it can improve specific knowledge and skill sets, but lack information on access. This implies that UME will benefit from expanding access to the autopsy witness program.