

Review Article

Moral and Ethical values of cadaver procurement for dissection

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Abstract: Dissection is the act of cutting up and analysing a tissue or a specimen in detail. Dissection of a dead body is one of the oldest methods of learning human anatomy in a medical college. It requires a great deal of dexterity and is the marker of a surgeon. Besides surgeons, other medical practitioners need to perform endoscopic procedures. Hence knowledge of dissection is a must for all medical professionals. This art of dissection is first learnt in the Anatomy Dissection Hall. However, procuring human cadavers for teaching and training purposes are surrounded by ethical reservations. This paper highlights the usefulness of cadaver dissection, enlightening the precise forms in which the body of the deceased person can be procured and used for teaching as well as for research. It is designed at setting some nominal guidelines regarding rules and regulations recommended for sustaining the standard of dissection as well as the dignity of the cadavers. A cadaver has a fundamental moral- ethical value that necessitates a reverential attitude towards it. The use of the cadavers for dissection must be done with profound respect for the deceased person. The best method of cadaver procurement is Voluntary Body Donation.

Keywords: Cadaveric Dissection, Surgeons, Medical Practitioners, Endoscopic Procedures, Moral-Ethical Values, Voluntary Body Donation.

INTRODUCTION

The dissection of the human body symbolises a procedure during which the body is sliced or divided as an aid to discerning the functions and relationships of its components. Dissection has been an important part of medical education for years now; as it contributes positively to the specialized training of not only surgeons in particular but also all medical professionals [1].

A cadaver has a fundamental moral- ethical value that necessitates a reverential attitude towards it. The ethical predicament emerges when an invasive manipulation of the cadaver is to be carried out [2].

Why should we possess a reverential attitude towards the human cadaver?

There are various reasons for the same:

- Firstly, the way we handle a cadaver indirectly indicates the way we would treat a live patient; the only difference between a cadaver and a human is the presence of life, otherwise cell to cell they are the same.

- Secondly we should always respect the memory of the departed. Disrespecting the cadaver means the deceased person him/herself.
- Thirdly the near ones of the deceased have endured an agonising and irremediable loss which should never be overlooked.
- Lastly every cadaver possesses a religious implication like resurrection or rebirth, disrespecting the human cadaver would advocate disregarding the entire human existence.

In view of the above, dissection of a cadaver should be performed in stringently guarded provisions so as to receive acceptance.

DISCUSSION

When a person voluntarily of his own accord and free will decides to donate his body during his lifetime, for furtherance of medical education and scientific progress, it is evidently the best accepted cadaver source.

The conditions to be taken into account are:

- a) Person should be an adult of sound mind
- b) He should give his informed consent in writing.
- c) The possibility of revoking at any time the given consent.
- d) The consent unaltered by moral or physical constraint.
- e) The existence of a legalized document (declaration before a public notary, donation contract, will of the deceased) which stipulates that the donation is done with a humanitarian, altruistic goal, without pursuing a material or other type of benefit.

All cadavers which are accepted for medical education purposes, be it for dissection or research purpose, are all governed by the Bombay Anatomy Act of 1949, whether they are voluntary donations or unclaimed cadavers [3].

A second way of cadaver procurement comes into existence when the deceased did not express, during lifetime, the wish to donate his/her body. Such a donation is made by the family/legal representative on behalf of the deceased person.

The rationale behind such a donation can be either due to avoidance of the high cost of the memorial services or it can be the family's aspiration to proffer a constructive value to the loss of their loved one. The approval of such donations "on behalf of someone else" are not considered suitable from an ethical outlook [4].

However, as voluntary donations are infrequent, and there is a "demand" that exceed the "supply", such donations are honoured [5].

When donations are based on family consent, there should be:

- a) The necessity of written consent from at least one major member of the family or relatives (in the following order: husband, parent, child, brother, sister);
- a) The inadmissibility of cadaver donation if during lifetime the deceased person expressed the option against such a donation.

The third and the last method of cadaver procurement is unclaimed cadavers and of those without family. It is considered to be the least ethical way. That is because the deceased person's consent concerning the use of his/her body for teaching purposes cannot be taken for granted.

The reasons which determine the legal acceptance of such a "cadaver source" are positively not altruistic; but are based on the acute requirements for teaching purposes [6].

Suitability for donation

The foremost intention of procurement of the cadaver is for dissection purpose so as to enable the undergraduate medical students master the normal anatomy of the human body. Hence some cadavers may not be considered appropriate for the same and may have to be rejected.

These are:

- Forensic cadavers (post mortem and medicolegal cases)
- Medical grounds e.g. the cadavers which are carriers of contagious diseases like tuberculosis or AIDS or HbS Ag (Australia Antigen)
- Body without skin intact – Bed sores or skin diseases like psoriasis etc
- Decomposed / extremely obese / extremely emaciated body [7].

It is imperative that the utilisation of the deceased person's body should be strictly within the directives of the Bombay Anatomy Act of 1949. The remains of the body should be given proper funeral services, with the possible participation of the family and/or of the students who have been benefitted from the cadaver. These final acts must be carried out by the medical institutions that have used these cadavers for teaching purposes [3].

CONCLUSION

A cadaver has a fundamental moral- ethical value that necessitates a reverential attitude towards it. The use of the cadavers for dissection must be done with profound respect for the deceased person.

The best method of cadaver procurement is Voluntary Body Donation, based on altruistic reason, by the person him/herself. But due to demand exceeding supply, cadavers can be obtained on behalf of the family or even unclaimed cadavers can be used for teaching purposes, although they are not ethically correct. Remains of the cadaver at the end of teaching should be accorded appropriate funeral services with the participation of the family, the students and the medical institutions.

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