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Original Research Article

A study to explore the perception of cadaveric oath taking ceremony in medical students of West Bengal

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Abstract

Background: "Cadaver is our first teacher" is most probably the first line that every medical student hears when they enter the dissection hall for the very first time. Every medical practitioner is indebted to these great souls who donated their body posthumously and to their families. From the year 2016 cadaveric oath taking ceremony was started in our country. In this ceremony 1st year MBBS students take a pledge or oath before touching the cadaver in anatomy dissection hall. The oath marks a formal commitment that underscores the importance of respect and professionalism while working with cadaver.
Aims and Objective: This study was conducted to assess the impact of that cadaveric oath taking ceremony among students.
Materials and Methods: The study was conducted in the department of anatomy in Murshidabad Medical College, Murshidabad, West Bengal. After taking Institutional ethical clearance a Google questionnaire was formed and validated. 125 students were requested to go through that questionnaire before and after the cadaveric oath taking ceremony. Students' responses were recorded and analyzed.
Result: It has been noticed that, where before cadaveric oath taking 2.4% students were thinking that the ceremony might not be necessary, after oath taking 100% students responded it was necessary. In this study students' responses were linked to the five-point Likert Scale, a type of psychometric response scale in which responders specify their level of agreement to a statement typically in five points: (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither agree nor disagree, (4) Agree and (5) Strongly agree. In every question the percentage of students who strongly agreed before ceremony was increased after taking oath. Hence it can be declared that this cadaveric oath taking must influence the students' mind.
Conclusion: The objectives of the study was checked with the result and a positive influence was observed correlating with the cadaveric oath taking ceremony.

Keywords: Cadaver our first teacher, Cadaveric Oath, Cadaveric oath ceremony, Medical Education, AETCOM

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1. Introduction

Cadaveric dissection is a necessary, vital, and indispensable part of anatomy learning in medical education.[1] From where are the cadavers available for dissection? These are donated human bodies, will be used for scientific research and medical training. Without these cadavers, anatomy learning will be incomplete and undoubtedly it is an important steppingstone in transformation of medical students to doctor. A Cadaveric Oath is a pledge that a medical student takes before touching the cadaver in the dissection hall; the oath emphasizes on proper handling of the cadaver, paying tribute to the soul and to knot the idea of empathy in the young medico's minds.[2] The oath is the formal commitment for showing respect and gratitude to the cadaver while studying anatomy, showing sensitivity, respect, compassion, emotional support and empathy to the patients and their families which is the mainstay of developing healthy doctor patient relationship in futurer. Hence before direct clinical exposure handling of cadavers with respect and gratitude as the first Silent teacher is the first and best opportunity for a medical student to put first step in their profession.[3] Cadaveric oath taking will also help the medical students to appreciate the selflessness of the donors. This was first

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introduced in 2016 in India with the objective of sensitizing the new medical students to respect cadaver as their first teacher.[4]

This study is about the perception of cadaveric oath taking ceremony among the first-year students, how the ceremony works effectively in creating awareness regarding voluntary body donation, alleviating the fear & discomfort about cadaveric dissection in students mind, orienting the behaviour towards the cadaver.[5]

2. Aims

To assess the perception of cadaveric oath taking ceremony among the First year MBBS students and its influence on awareness building, alleviation of fear and orientation of behaviour in the dissection hall.

3. Objectives

1. To assess empathy of students towards cadaver through cadaveric oath taking.
2. To assess whether the ceremony helps in alleviating the stigma of dead bodies or not.
3. To assess whether the ceremony can increase the awareness of body donation or not.

4. Materials and Methods

This longitudinal observational study was done in the Department of Anatomy, Murshidabad medical college (MSDMCH), Murshidabad, West Bengal among 118 first year MBBS students over 4 months. Students who were willing and volunteered to participate were included and rest excluded from the study.

For collecting data a Google questionnaire is formed which was then validated and students view about the cadaveric oath taking was taken twice, once before and once after the cadaveric oath ceremony.

Statistical Analysis:

Students' opinions are projected in Likert's scale which is afive-point rating scale to measure opinions, attitudes, and behaviours. Here 1 isstrongly disagree, 2 is disagree, 3 neither disagree or agree, 4 is agree and 5 isstrongly agree. Before and after cadaveric oath ceremony students' opinions havebeen noticed to know how cadaveric oath influenced them according to the objectiveof our study.

5. Results

Table 1 it was noted that, after cadaveric oath ceremony 100% students responded it is necessary whereas before taking oath 2.4% students were in opposite opinion.

Table 1: Question 1

Whether the cadaveric oath is necessary	Response before cadaveric oath taking ceremony	Response after cadaveric oath taking ceremony
Yes	97.6%	100%
No	2.4%	0%

Table 2: Pre and post cadaveric likert scale response

Questions	Likert Scale Response	Before cadaveric oath taking ceremony	After cadaveric oath taking ceremony	
The cadaveric Oath teaches us that the cadaver is our first teacher	1	4 (3.4)	0 (0.0)	P = 0.004
	2	8 (6.8)	2 (1.7)	
	3	10 (8.5)	12 (10.2)	
	4	30 (25.4)	19 (16.1)	
	5	66 (55.9)	85 (72)	
The cadaveric oath teaches us the unknown ethics of medical field	1	17 (14.4)	2 (1.7)	P = 0.000
	2	36 (30.5)	5 (4.2)	
	3	30 (25.4)	20 (16.9)	
	4	23 (19.5)	35 (29.7)	
	5	12 (10.2)	56 (47.5)	
The cadaveric oath teaches us the importance of handling cadavers with dignity and purpose	1	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	P = 0.000
	2	5 (4.2)	0 (0.0)	
	3	23 (19.5)	12 (10.2)	
	4	45 (38.1)	11 (9.3)	
	5	45 (38.1)	95 (18.5)	
	1	6 (9.1)	0 (0.0)	P = 0.000

The cadaveric oath teaches us the sacrifice and benevolence of the donor and his family	2	35 (29.7)	0 (0.0)	
	3	35 (29.7)	30 (25.4)	
	4	30 (25.4)	29 (24.6)	
	5	12 (10.2)	59 (50.0)	
The cadaveric oath teaches us how to respectfully handle the body during and after dissection	1	6 (5.1)	0 (0.0)	P = 0.000
	2	18 (15.3)	6 (5.1)	
	3	30 (25.4)	30 (25.4)	
	4	58 (49.2)	30 (25.4)	
	5	6 (5.1)	52 (44.1)	
The cadaveric oath ceremony inspires us for body donation in future	1	11 (9.3)	0 (0.0)	P = 0.000
	2	24 (20.3)	0 (0.0)	
	3	18 (15.3)	41 (34.7)	
	4	42 (35.6)	35 (29.7)	
	5	23 (19.5)	42 (35.6)	
During Cadaveric Oath Ceremony it must be emphasized about the overall behavior in dissection hall	1	6 (5.1)	0 (0.0)	P = 0.000
	2	30 (25.4)	0 (0.0)	
	3	28 (23.7)	36 (30.5)	
	4	48 (40.7)	29 (24.5)	
	5	6 (5.1)	53 (44.9)	
It is like a modern library consisting of natural 3D anatomical illustrations	1	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	P = 0.000
	2	24 (20.3)	0 (0.0)	
	3	24 (20.3)	24 (20.3)	
	4	64 (54.2)	18 (15.3)	
	5	6 (5.1)	76 (64.4)	
It is like a temple of medical education	1	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	
	2	18(15.3)	0(0.0)	
	3	3 36(30.5)	12(5.1)	P=0.000
	4	4 41(34.7)	6(84.7)	
	5	23(19.5)	100 (84.7)	

6. Discussion

Cadavers are essential for studying human anatomy and to study that complicated subject from cadaveric dissection is indispensible. So, cadaveric dissection based anatomical education is absolutely necessary for hands on training of human anatomy which will be the foundation of clinical knowledge. Now the cadaver student relationship is very important as it silently teaches about the bioethics and that will actually create the foundation of future doctor patient relationships. Cadaveric oath taking now a days a part of medical education before starting dissection class in which students pay gratitude and thanking the great soul for his sacrifice in study of anatomy.

In the present study 118 students among the 125 willingly participated. Our study is to explore the perception of students' feelings towards cadaver whether that is changed after cadaveric oath taking or not. The students responses was recorded in Google questionnaire form, before and after the cadaveric oath ceremony and it explore the fact that how cadaveric oath changed their mind.

Before oath taking 2.4%students were thinking cadaveric oath was not necessary, after taking the oath 100 % students opined that cadaveric oath was absolutely necessary.

Responses of google questionnaire were taken in Likert's scale 1 to 5 which is from the strongly disagree to strongly agree gradings.

Cadaver is our first teacher, in this question where before oath taking 55.9% of students were strongly agreed to the fact but after oath taking 72% students strongly agreed to it. Statistical analysis says the p value is 0.004 and the result is significant. Before taking oath only 10.2% students were strongly agreed to the fact that cadaver teaches us unknown ethics of medical profession but after taking oath taking 47.5% were strongly agreed to it and the value is statistically significant as the p value is 0.000.

Before taking oath only 10.2% students strongly agreed to the thought that cadaveric oath teaches about the value of body donation but after taking oath that value changes to 50 %. Both the cases the values aresignificant statistically (p value is .000). Similarly, pre cadaveric oath scenario was whereonly 5.1% students were strongly agreed to the fact that cadaveric oath teaches us aboutrespectful handling of cadaver before and after dissection, 44.1% students came to become strongly agreed side after taking the oath.

In 2017, the study conducted by Manisha R. Gaikwad[6] found that cadaveric oath positively affects students

regarding bioethics and increasing awareness regarding body donation.In present study cadaveric oath taking ceremony was successfully impacted the students a lot that before oath taking ceremony only 19.5% students were strongly agreed to that cadaveric oath may inspire them for future body donation but the value changes after taking oath to 35.6% that is also significant statistically.

After cadaveric oath taking 64.4% students were strongly agreed to the fact that cadaver is like a modern library consisting of natural 3D anatomical illustrations where before cadaveric oath taking only 5.1% students were in strongly agreed to the fact.[7] Cadaveric oath taking ceremony influenced them and moved them so much that 84.7%students were strongly agreed to that the Cadaver is a temple of medical education, where the percentage was only 19.5% before taking oath.

Keche HA et al. in their study on Cadaveric oath – perceptions of first year medical students in the Department of Anatomy of J.N.M.C., Sawangi (Meghe), Wardha, found that more than 80% of the students agreed the importance of the cadaveric oath, 98.18% students strongly agreed about the importance of body donation.97.73% students were of the opinion that cadaver should be treated with respect, compassion, care and dignity. 97.27 % students agreed that cadavers are their silent mentors.[8]

In the study of Lin SC, Hsu J, Fan V (2009). "Silent virtuous teachers"- a module to learn the ethics and values of cadaveric dissection, where 447 first year UG medical students participated in different activities related to 'Cadaver as our first teacher'. They attended and participated in interactive lectures, performed individual assignments, and also joined in a poster-making competition.[9] The major themes they highlighted in their work were: "cadaver as a teacher", "acknowledgement and thanksgiving to the donors and family", bonding, and empathy. Through these activities they felt to be motivated and gained knowledge regarding ethical perspective of handling human body and cadavers.

Dissabandara LO, Nirthanan SN, Khoo TK, Tedman R. Role of cadaveric dissections in musculoskeletal dissection in 2011, 2012 and 2013, by second year students in the Griffith University GEMP.[10] The majority of students (>75%) agreed or strongly agreed with the positive perceptions of cadaveric dissections.Comparing cadaveric dissection with other forms of learning anatomy, students indicated that they did not prefer an option of substituting dissections with lectures (71.2%), good computer programs (74.4%) or pre-dissected material (54.6%).

Saha, Nirmalya &Moirangthem, M.S. (2015) in their study on 'Attitude of first year medical students in dissection hall' used a predesigned questionnaire of 25 items which comprises of socio-demographic characteristics, physical & emotional reactions and mixed feelings, attitudes of students. The questionnaire was distributed among 100 first year medical students of 2013-2014 batch within 7 days of attending Cadaveric oath ceremony.[11] Their observations and findings are corroborating the present study demonstrating a favourable outcome to cadaver dissection and its indispensability in anatomy learning.

Lalit, M., Piplani, S., Mahajan, A., & Arora, A. K. (2018) performed their study on 'Attitude and Response of First-Year Medical Students Toward Cadaver, Dissection, and Subject of Anatomy'.[12] 91.66 % of the students realized that the cadaver was once a living being and they had empathy and sympathy for the body and 98.49 % had respect for the person who donated his dead body for them to learn.

Archana Narasipuram, performed study on 'Impact of cadaveric oath on first mbbs students'.She prepared a questionnaire asking for feedback on importance and impact of cadaveric oath from 100 students in the first year (2019), as they took Cadaveric Oath and also from 100 students, who were not exposed to Cadaveric Oath in the department of Anatomy at Apollo Medical College, Hyderabad.[4] She came to the conclusion that those students who have taken cadaveric oath have shown greater respect and it also changed their attitude towards Cadaver. She also found that the students started treating Cadaver as a first Silent teacher, which emphasizes again the fact that the Cadaveric oath is still one important modality to introduce bioethics, even in the era of technology.

Anne D Souza and others in their study on 'Cadaver as a first teacher: A module to learn the ethics and values of cadaveric dissection where the students accepted that the module taught them to handle cadavers with respect and ethical and humanitarian aspect of human cadaver. The students felt that sensitising them early might have helped them to establish a practice grounded in professionalism, human values, and empathy.[13]

In 2020 K. Guo and others concluded that cadaveric oath ceremony imparted a positive vibe among the medical students who had attended the ceremony at Zhongshan medical school regarding medical ethics, doctor patient relationship and reduced mental inhibitions for handling corpses as compared to those who have not attended.[14] In present study for assessing the immediate effect of cadaveric oath whether the oath taking may alleviate fear of dissection and dissection hall among students, before oath taking only 5.1% students strongly agreed to the fact but after taking the oath 44.9% students strongly opined that the cadaveric oath was necessary and it successfully helped them to overcome the fear regarding the dissection and dissection hall and the value is significant statistically (p value 0.000).

According to study conducted by Sv S, Maria Francis Y and others of 250 1st year MBBS students, 97.6% of students expressed that it is the dissection that teaches anatomy the best, not the new artificial techniques, 3D models or computer-aided teaching.[15] The timely oath taking also

helped to overcome the shock of handling cadaver for first time was the opinion of 88.5% students. This study corroborates with the similar mental perceptions towards cadaveric oath and upcoming dissection classes.

After the first cadaveric oath ceremony conducted in their college in 2023, Poonam Singh and others found that 68% students could find the cadaveric oath is important for learning Anatomy among 100 medical students who willingly participated as study sample in their study. 95% of the students felt that cadaver to be treated with dignity and care.[16] In this study Before oath taking 38.1% students strongly agreed to that cadaver handling must be with dignity but 80.5% students strongly agreed with the fact that the event was so heart touching, and they realised the value of sacrifice of body donation, and they are grateful to the great soul and their family members.

7. Conclusion

Moral values, gratitude and respect to the donors are the three basic senses each medical professional should have in them, as no virtual dissection can ever replace the cadaver dissection in the way to learn human anatomy. Students when come to anatomy department at the very beginning of their MBBS course keep a fear of cadaver dissection and dissection hall.

Cadaveric oath recitation will help the students to overcome the fear and they will show respect to the cadavers as “Silent Teacher”. The empathy within them will help them to make responsible behaviour with the patients in their professional carrier. They will understand the value of body donation also. Therefore, this ceremony can be considered as the pioneering step to imbibe Bioethics among the medical students. Moreover, this ceremony also helped to reduce to a great extent the social stigma and anxiety of handling human cadavers and therefore in long run the human body as a patient also among the new comers in medical field.

8. Ethical Clearance

Ethical clearance was given by Institutional ethical committee of Murshidabad Medical College vide Memo no. MSD/MCH/PR/1514/2022/B dated 24/06/2022

9. Conflict of Interest

We the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest among us regarding this article.

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