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Review Article

BODY DONATION: A LIFE AFTER LIFE

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ABSTRACT

Anatomy is the branch of medicine where study of structures of human body is done at the level of first year of academic course of every medical profession. Dissection or cadaveric anatomy is the only efficient tool to gain the knowledge of human body structures. A medical student who never stepped in the cadaveric laboratory of his institute during his first year can neither be a good physician or surgeon in his medical career. So dissection plays a very important role in learning anatomy completely. Now a day there is a tremendous lack of cadavers in medical institutes due to ever increasing number of institutes. The supply of cadavers is very less as compared with the demand. Government hospitals are trying at their best to provide unclaimed bodies to the medical institutes but this effort is facing limitations. So there is a need of body donation awareness in public so that maximum cadavers should be obtained from this way and the hunger of cadavers of medical institutes is satisfied at some level.

KEY WORDS: Cadaver, Body donation, Anatomy act, Death

INTRODUCTION

In any field or profession, a knowledge which is not gained without support of practical or training is very dangerous. It is utmost important in the medical field to acquire knowledge with practical implementation because a doctor has to handle a life of the patient. Actually this practical training starts from first year of anatomy learning where a student has to deal with a dead body during dissection. In this course, one who has sound knowledge of anatomy and physiology of the human body, becomes a successful medical professional in future. Thorough knowledge of human body is very essential for a physician to reach up to the exact diagnosis and proper treatment. This knowledge comes only from dissection of human body.

Actually there is a tremendous craze of dissection in the newly admitted students to the medical course. They are very much excited and feared as well to face a dead body. The first day of dissection, the vigorous odor in the dissection hall and a first cut on the cadaver is the memorable event for the students like any other sweet memories of college days. But now a day, most of the students are far apart from these memories and getting disappointed due to lack of cadavers in their institutes. Mushrooming of medical institutes all over is a big obstacle in the supply of cadavers.

Voluntary body donation is an ideal solution to overcome this issue. People must come forward and take self-initiation for body bequest to fulfill the demand of institutes.

Body donation is the act of giving one's body to any medical institute for education and research purpose after death, and that too without any interest and rewards.¹ It is a golden opportunity for one to be alive even after death in the memory of students and

medical institute. This gift to the medical students is valued and honored beyond measure than any gift of the world. Voluntary body donation is becoming the ever increasing demand of the medical education.

NEED OF DISSECTION

Anatomy and physiology are the two basic and fundamental subjects of any medical institute which are full of a treasure of knowledge of body structures. Anatomy is the subject which is having practical demonstration in the form of dissection. In any field of medicine, theoretical knowledge should be accompanied by practical knowledge. With only one of these, one cannot be perfect. A good theoretical knowledge accompanied by deep practical knowledge is always helpful to expand the boundaries of knowledge in any field.² In fact one who wants to become a surgeon in future, it is must for him to dissect the human body and study each and every part thoroughly.³ Dissection has become a principal learning tool of anatomy. Books or any literature of anatomy alone itself is not sufficient to learn anatomy.

Now a day, with the advancement in technology, the teaching methods are turning towards computers and LCDs rather than teaching with traditional aids like chalk and blackboard. We have CDs containing all literature which is highly effective as audiovisual aid of learning on LCDs. Even 3D dissection software is also available in many institutes. The institutes lacking cadavers are using such aids to satisfy students up to some extent. But actual dissection of human body is incredible which gives a very different delight especially when we dissect out any organ from the body with all its parts, layers, blood vessels and nerves intact.

So dissection cannot be compromised with above teaching aids and there should be no substitute to it. Anatomy without dissection is like a living without sole. But unfortunately this sole is lost due unavailability of cadavers. So, this need of dissection and cadavers should be overcome only with the help of voluntary body donation.

BODY DONATION

Donation is the word which has become very popular in a wrong manner now a day actually has a very good meaning. Donation or Dana means to give.⁴ In our mythology, it is said that always give anything to others which is either excess or no useful to you. There is a description of many types of Danas in mythological texts such as annadana, jaladana, godana, bhoomidana, etc⁵. Dana has been an indivisible part of our culture since the period of Vedas and puranas. In Padmapurana, it is stated that in krutayuga, practice of penance is best karma of life, in tretayuga, obtaining knowledge is the best karma of life, in dwaparayuga, oblation is the best karma of life and in kaliyuga, donation is the best karma of life. Donation fulfils our sense of charity and it takes us near to divinity by becoming selfless.

Deha means body and dana means to donate. Dehadana is a gracious and unselfish act. Shankaracharya, a great Hindu saint says "idam shariram paropkaram" which means your body is for the use of others and the death is not the end, it is the beginning.⁶ In mythology, there are some references regarding organ and body donation. Lord Ganesha got elephant's head from a cursed demon Gajasura who donated his head to Lord Ganesha.⁷ Another example is of Sage Maharshi Dadhichi who donated his bones to devatas to defeat demon Vritrasura by making vajra from Dadhichi's bones.⁸

In eighteenth century, first evidence of body donation is found when British Utilitarian Philosopher Jurist and social reformer Jeremy Bentham donated their body by will.⁹ In India, Mr. Pandurang Sridhar Apte donated his body to B. J. medical college, Pune in 1956.¹⁰ Ex CM of West Bengal and a senior communist leader Mr. Jyoti Basu also donated his body after death to the Medical college in Kolkatta.¹¹

These people laid a stone of this noble cause in the form of body donation. But still the numbers of body donation are worrisome. According to a survey carried out in Nashik city of Maharashtra in early 2015, 32% people are completely unaware of body donation, 41% people do not believe in body donation, 16 % are doubtfully thinking of body donation and only 6 % people showed their willingness in body donation.¹² This shows that there is no awareness in public regarding this issue, people are having misbeliefs in body donation and medical institutes and media are still on back foot regarding campaigning of body donation.

NEED OF BODY DONATION

Cadaver based dissection have been a sole teaching tool to study human anatomy from ancient times. Acharya Sushruta also performed dissection before almost five thousand years and described human anatomy in Sushrutasamhita.¹³ Dissection has helped in development of knowledge, skill and precision in medical practice. But not all the students of today's generation are lucky enough to enjoy the dissection due to shortage of cadavers.

Civil hospitals and hospitals attached with government colleges are supplying unclaimed dead bodied to medical institutes for

dissection under the provision of Bombay Anatomy Act.¹⁴ There are so many drawbacks in getting unclaimed bodies from such hospitals. Number of unclaimed bodies is very less as compared to the demand. Second thing is the procedure to get these bodies from hospitals is very complicated, time consuming and costly too. Most important drawback is the status of the unclaimed bodies. Mostly they are of street beggars which are died because of long term disease or starvation. So the bodies are very much emaciated which are almost of no use for muscular dissection. Improper preservation method, use of substandard chemicals and non-maintenance of cold storage add more effect to reject the unclaimed bodies.

It is quoted that such bodies are not suitable and should not be taken for dissection. Acharya Sushruta mentions that the bodies lacking one or another part, affected by poisons, diseased from a long period and reached to old age should be avoided for dissection.¹⁵

Opposite to this, bodies obtained from body donation are very ideal for dissection. The person who donated his body is a known person. Recent death of that person is beneficial to carry out preservation method instantly and effectively with proper care and standard chemicals. The person is healthy and fit as compared to the unclaimed bodies so that all structures of the body are anatomically perfect. So to obtain fresh bodies, now it has become a need of every institute to establish body donation centre in their campus and run the campaigning for it.

GENERAL ATTITUDE ABOUT BODY DONATION

Though the term 'body donation' is being discussed all over and people are frequently asking about this concept, but actually this discussion is not resulting in increase of number of body donation. Most important reason for body donation is lack of awareness and the negative attitude of the people. Spirituality and religious beliefs are the major potholes for body donation. Majority of the people think about their rebirth and consider that after body donation, their rebirth is not possible. Some are considering they will get Moksha after death and will go to heaven and hence are not ready to donate their body. Some believe that their body would not be treated with respect, some has a fear that their organs would be sold and rest are refusing body donation because they love their body very much. People are not ready to come out of these beliefs. It is the sole responsibility of medical institutes and media to propagate this issue on a large platform.

ROLE OF INSTITUTES and MEDIA

- 1) Body donation unit should be established at every medical institute.
- 2) Body donation campaigns should be arranged frequently.
- 3) Advertisements, handbills, cutouts, in newspapers and television.
- 4) Help of NGOs in promoting this campaign.
- 5) Honoring the donors.
- 6) Providing healthcare and free treatment to donors.

CONCLUSION

Though body donation seems hard to digest concept now a day, but if this is properly handled and campaigned by institutes and media, a new evolution may take place and there will be much availability of cadavers in coming years. It is the fact that whether to donate the body or no is one's own individual decision, but if

everyone will start thinking 'why not me' instead of 'why me', then no medical student will be deceived from dissection in future. There is a proverb in Marathi language saying 'marave pari kirtiroopi urave'. But it can be now changed and used as a slogan in body donation campaign as 'marave pari deharoopi urave'. A concept of rebirth is still doubtful but one can experience another life after this life by body donation and can become immortal by this noble cause.

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