

## **ANATOMY: THE TRAINING OF AFFECT RESTRICTION OR EMOTIONAL CONNECTEDNESS**

- **There has been much discussion and debate about the wisdom of introducing dissection at the beginning of the first year of medical school. There are many convincing reasons why establishing a strong foundation of knowledge in anatomy is important as early as possible in training.**
- **But it has been observed that perhaps an unintended consequence of this early exposure to dissection is that it begins a steady process of desensitization to the suffering of patients. Anatomy lab can be the beginning of a physician's training in how to isolate and restrict affect. Unfortunately, an unintended consequence of human dissection is that it may create in medical students an inappropriate and callous "property of easiness" in dealing with death and the human body**
- **We'd like to think that dissecting a donor is entirely separate from treating a patient; in fact the habits laid down in the anatomy carry over to the clinical years.**
- **Medicine is a wonderful and also challenging profession. In particular, it exposes young adults to often overwhelming levels of suffering in others and stress and uncertainty in themselves. Anatomy lab, depending on how it is conducted, can teach very different lessons of how to treat others and how to care for oneself, particularly how to deal appropriately with the full range of emotions that arises in clinical interactions.**
- **Some of the emotions students report in the anatomy lab are awe and wonder; gratitude and a concomitant sense of responsibility to take advantage of the opportunity they've been given; they can also worry about the sacrilegious aspect of dissection – the sense of committing a violation - and at times experience dissection as brutalizing to the donor. This can lead to confusion and even guilt.**
- **Sometimes students try to cope with the troubling aspects of anatomy by detaching from their emotions. Detachment conforms to prevalent views of medicine that draw a clear distinction between doctor and patient, student and donor.**
- **Detachment ultimately results in students feeling disillusioned with medicine and disappointed in themselves. Detachment and lack of empathy in physicians is associated with worse health outcomes and poorer doctor-patient relationships.**
- **Anatomy is an Opportunity to Begin to Develop Attitudes of Professionalism**
  - \*Respect for the human body
  - \*Leadership and teamwork
  - \*Treating patients with empathy, compassion, and dignity; and learning how to regulate personal emotions so that they can remain open-hearted and emotionally connected without feeling overwhelmed.**

