Title:
Undergraduate Nursing Autopsy Perceptions: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract Summary:
This qualitative research study was recently conducted at a Midwestern university in the United States to gain knowledge of student perceptions regarding autopsy viewing. Little research has been performed regarding student nursing autopsy experiences. Autopsies were performed by board-certified forensic pathologist at medium-sized hospital.

Learning Activity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>EXPANDED CONTENT OUTLINE</th>
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<td>The learner will be able to discuss common ways that students applied knowledge gained during autopsies.</td>
<td>Via PowerPoint, handout, and discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The learner will be able to identify common types of emotions that students experienced during autopsy viewing.</td>
<td>Via PowerPoint, handout, and discussion.</td>
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Abstract Text:

Purpose: Because of the scant amount of literature regarding nursing students and their perceptions of autopsies, this qualitative study was conducted. A medical surgical nursing course at a mid-sized state university provides the opportunity for students to view autopsies every semester with a board-certified forensic pathologist. The autopsies are performed at a mid-sized hospital close to campus. Many of the students go on to become advanced practice nurses and require a solid foundation in anatomy, physiology, and pathophysiology.

Methods: Qualitative study with 20 participants over a 9-month period. The approach was phenomenological. A Qualtrics survey was developed. The sample was a convenience sample of 18-21 year old students, mainly Caucasian, female, and in the first semester of their junior year. It is voluntary for the students to observe the autopsies. The university's Institutional Review Board has
approved this study. Research was based on Illeris' theory and included perceptions of experiences and new knowledge formation. Illeris' theory has three dimensions: cognition, emotion, and society.

**Results:** Rich themes emerged regarding the students' experiences, both emotional, psychological, and knowledge-based. Students reported feeling personalization and empathy. Anxiety and apprehension was verbalized at the beginning of the autopsy, desensitization occurred in later stages of the autopsies. The students were also very pleased with the amount of knowledge that they acquired during the autopsy regarding anatomy, physiology, and pathophysiology. The majority of the students' results were positive.

**Conclusion:** Autopsies are important learning tools. Bias may be present as a result of waiting to fill out Qualtrics survey and discussing experience with peers. This study could be strengthened with a pre/post test and mixed method evaluation tool. The results may not be replicated related to coroner teaching ability. The authors used a convenience sample and were unable to capture a broad-range of gender and ethnicity. Anatomy, physiology, and pathophysiology are important for students to understand as they learn about medical surgical nursing concepts. Students reported processing and debriefing activities were important after viewing autopsies.