

The Joy of Studying Anatomy

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You have studied Boyle's law : In an enclosed mass of gas, at constant temperature, $P \times V = k$.

Robert Boyle was a profound philosopher. He urged a deep study of the structure and function of the human body which, according to him is like a divine mansion. To study Anatomy is to be an Alice or Alex in wonderland.

The study of gross Anatomy, as by dissection, begins with the appreciation of the fact that the only difference between you and a cadaver is that you are permeated by *Chaitanya* or life-principle, the cadaver is not. Otherwise, cell to cell and fibre to fibre, a live human being and a cadaver are structurally alike. Dissection and dissected parts allow you a direct, 'hands-on' approach to every muscle, every nerve, the heart, the liver, the brain. It is a journey through the most complicated machine on earth. Despite all the advances in medicine, gross anatomy continues to be the theatre whereupon the drama of health and disease, life and death is played. Ceaselessly.

Teachers and students are fortunate that the study of anatomy has travelled a long way after the pioneers like Sushruta, Vesalius and Gray introduced and evolved the art and the science of dissection. A student is now offered a journey into a wonderland of cytology, histology, embryology, molecular biology and genetics. Radiology as by X-rays, CT Scan, USG, MRI and PET Scan bring Anatomy and Physiology live on a film or on a screen. The arrival of these imaging modalities has, once again heightened the importance of gross anatomy, including the study of sections in various planes. What begins as an anatomic adventure in first MBBS can continue as a passion as you course along clinical studies at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Anatomy, joyfully studied, serves as a highway to excellence in the diagnosis and the treatment of diseases. Every inch of that joyful journey will serve you and your patients unfailingly.

It was Jean Fernel who said "What geography is to history, anatomy is to medicine - it describes the theatre of events". Someone else put it a little differently by declaring "The adage that dead men tell no tales does not hold true in the dissection hall". The moral of these two aphorisms is that you should make the most of your stint in the anatomy department. What you gain here will stay with you for the lifetime of your clinical, diagnostic, operative and research work. Medical thinking and doing, from molecule to man rests on anatomy. Anatomy is just not Gray, but a colourful, joyful understanding, a song to be sung, a melody to be marvelled at.

Remember Somerset Maugham, himself a medical man, who said :

***"In Anatomy it is better to have learned and lost
than never to have learned at all."***