

Title: Anatomy in pharmacy education: a phenomenological study exploring student experiences

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Abstract:

Background Little is known about pharmacy students' experiences of learning anatomy. We developed and implemented a bespoke 'human anatomy for pharmacists' provision for first-year MPharm students. Methods A phenomenological design was used. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews that were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis using QSR NVivo. The study received institutional ethics approval. Results Sixteen students were interviewed. Three themes were identified. 1) Gross anatomy and professional attributes were reported as learning outcomes, e.g. variation in the shape and size of organs and how these fit together within anatomical landscapes, as well as developing respect, empathy, and emotional control required to deal with death. 2) Haptic learning i.e. touching the specimens, acted as a hook to focus learning and prompt recall. Students found learning through practical sessions more engaging than previous methods and were surprised by differences between diagrams and real human tissue. 3) Patient-focused learning was reported by students when cadaveric tissue resembled living patients. Hospital pharmacy roles were identified as the most likely to benefit from a good understanding of anatomy however students recognised the value of professional attributes they had developed, to other sectors. Conclusion The results of this study demonstrate the value of teaching anatomy to pharmacy students goes beyond developing a broad knowledge of anatomical structures but also engages a deeper learning of professional attributes.