

Student perceptions of the value of potted anatomical specimens in relation to dissection and other anatomical teaching resources.

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Anatomy remains an uncontested cornerstone of medical education; however over the past decade the method through which it is taught has been debated. This debate has focused mainly on the use of traditional human dissection compared to modern alternatives. Yet there appears to be a paucity of literature discussing the value of potted anatomical specimens. The aim of this study was to compare the perceived value of potted specimens with that of other resources used to teach anatomy to pre-clinical medical students at University College London (UCL). During the 2013/2014 academic year, anonymous closed questionnaires were analysed prior to (n = 433) and following (n = 474) simple interventions, such as additional signage, corresponding labelled images and requesting anatomy demonstrators to make use of potted specimens in their teaching sessions. The results suggest that potted specimens are more useful to students during their second year compared to their first year (i.e. after the interventions). Potted specimens were also more helpful to this year's first years compared to last year's first year cohort (i.e. after the interventions). In conclusion, human tissue remains a vital resource for teaching anatomy at UCL. The data suggests that the use of simple interventions increases the utility of potted specimens. The authors recommend that medical schools increase awareness of potted specimens as part of the rich tapestry of learning methods available to students.

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