

MORLEY, VICTORIA*; FOREMAN, JOHN*; CECILIA BRASSETT, HELEN TAYLOR, MARK LILLICRAP, STEPHEN BARCLAY. *Co-first authors. School of Clinical Medicine, University of Cambridge, Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge, United Kingdom. **Anxiety and Anticipation: How do medical students feel prior to entry into the Dissecting Room?**

Full-body cadaveric dissection remains a cornerstone of anatomy teaching in Cambridge but can be a daunting prospect for first-year students. This study aims to improve understanding of students' feelings prior to dissection, with a view to optimising their experiences of this 'rite of passage'. Before the first session, all students were invited to select five adjectives from a list, provide free-text comments to qualify these feelings and report their experience of personal bereavement and seeing a dead body. The response rate was 97% (275/287): 21% and 54% respectively had experienced bereavement within the past year and five years: 41% had previously seen a dead body. Overall, 99% chose positive adjectives, selecting at least one of 'interested', 'fascinated' or 'enthusiastic', and viewing dissection as a valuable learning experience for first-hand visualisation of anatomy. However, 87% selected 'anxious', 'apprehensive' or 'terrified' at least once, with 35% choosing two or more such adjectives. Common concerns included seeing the cadaver, feeling faint, and dissecting badly, coupled with a desire to respect the donors and make the most of this opportunity. In conclusion, the prospect of dissection evokes conflicting feelings and expectations. Greater awareness of students' emotional challenges will help to improve their experience.