Reviewer's report

Title: On Death and Dying - Evaluation of a Reflective, Interdisciplinary Course Element in Anatomy Undergraduate Teaching

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Reviewer: Werner Wittkowski

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Subject: Research Article: „On Death and Dying – Evaluation of a Reflective, Interdisciplinary Course Element in Anatomy Undergraduate Teaching“ by Bernd Alt-Epping et al.

Teaching Anatomy since many years I am concerned very often with the wide range of emotions of our students – meanwhile often in the age of just 18 or 19 years - at the beginning of the dissection course. There is broad agreement that the students first contact with mortality in the dissection course has a considerable impact for the future balance of empathy and action in the treatment of their patients. No doubt in most medical faculties there is a deficit in offering some help during this emotionally important phase of personal development.

Alt-Epping and his colleagues describe a new approach by adding an interdisciplinary course element during the first days of the dissection course with the topic of death and dying in the students own experiences and feelings.

The course element consists of a lecture, a seminar with small groups of students and 3 questionnaires for evaluation, all at the best possible time. Teaching concept and methods of evaluation are described in an exact and clear manner. The chapter results and discussion is focussed on evaluation of the questionnaires with expected data, such as a “certain emotional blunting” during dissection experiences, and also unexpected data, as the high percentage of students who had already experience with death and dying or the considerable increase of respondents who favoured the idea of donating their bodies for medical purposes. Figures illustrating methods and results give a good overview on the relevant details.

A minor point of criticism: I miss a more detailed description of the themes of the lecture, and the course as well as topics that were addressed in the seminar in order to motivate students to express their personal thoughts and feelings.