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TRENDS IN WHOLE BODY DONATION IN A SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTION OVER A THREE-DECADE PERIOD (1988-2017): IMPLICATIONS FOR MEDICAL EDUCATION

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Introduction: Dissection and prosection remain the gold standard for the teaching of anatomy to pre-clinical medical students across the world. This has made the practice of whole body donation the cornerstone of medical programs.

Objective: This study aimed at determining the trends in body donation among South Africans, and at predicting the best possible, and most realistic, approach for the teaching of anatomy in the near future.

Materials and Methods: Data from 696 cadavers donated during a three-decade period (1988-2017) were obtained from the files of the Discipline of Clinical Anatomy, University of KwaZulu-Natal South Africa. Data were analysed as percentages, mean $\pm$ standard deviation, using Statistical package for social sciences version 24.

Results: Most bodies were donated in the first decade of this study (1988-1997). Funeral services accounted for the major source of donations. Bodies were predominantly in the seventh decade of life (18.8%) and a larger proportion were males (61.6%). The practice of body donation were found to be more among the whites (57.5%) than all the other races. Most deaths according to this study were related to cardiovascular and cardiopulmonary issues (21.6%) and malignancies (11.1%), while a larger percentage were due to "unknown" causes (37.3%).

Conclusions: The study was able to show that the trend in the practice of body donation in South Africa has been erratic, which makes it difficult to predict the number of bodies available for medical education. Alternative approaches to anatomy education such as plastination techniques and computational models need to be sought to ensure sound and uninterrupted medical programs in South African medical schools.