Challenges of Teaching and Learning Human Anatomy in the 21st Century

Roland Weiczner,
Department of Forensic Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Szeged, Szeged, Hungary
weiczner.roland@med.u-szeged.hu

"Learners need endless feedback more than they need endless teaching."
(Grant Wiggins)

The medical students of the 21st century are the children of the digital world, hardly any of them have memories about the pre-internet era. They crave for action, they need involvement, they want to be motivated, and they are active in expressing opinions.

The main challenges in the professional life of the anatomists today are as follows: the hardships of keeping the medical students constantly motivated, fighting for a proper place for anatomy within the ever-changing and constantly reformed curricula, making the taught material as applied and as clinically oriented as possible, finding a way to improve the human resource of the departments and trying to figure out how to become successful educators and researchers at the same time (not even mentioning the work-life balance).

The central topic for this year is the motivating feedback, so within the given workshop time frame, we plan to discuss together the different components of this “reflex arc”: (1) the importance of clear learning objectives, as guidelines for teaching and exams; (2) the right methods to make the students involved and interested; (3) to offer the possibilities for self-directed learning to make the contact teaching hours as useful as possible; (4) to assess the advancement of the students keeping the main outcome goals always in the forefront (i.e. the priority of skills over pure lexical knowledge); and (5) to establish the ways for receiving feedback from all the parties involved: students and teachers, as well.

Feedback arrives at least in two different ways: formally and informally. The formal ways consist of practical and theoretical assessments, midterm and end-of-term exams (aiming to measure the advancement of the students towards the faculty-designated goals); and course evaluation sheets (as paper-based or in online form). Nevertheless, one should not forget about the feedback coming from informal channels: the mainly anonymous opinions of the students about the teaching activity of the departments, efficacy of contact teaching hours, fairness of the exams, and the professionalism of the teaching faculty.

With the help of all kind of feedback, the main duty of the teaching faculty is to act as a mentor to facilitate the self-improvement of the students by directing them towards the required objectives via choosing the right teaching methods. We should not forget that motivating the students is not enough, we have to motivate ourselves (the teaching faculty), as well.