

**ATTITUDE TOWARDS ANATOMY AS A PROSPECTIVE CAREER AMONG UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL STUDENTS**Rubi Saikia<sup>1</sup>, Natasha Gohain<sup>2</sup>, Santanu Kr. Sarma<sup>3</sup>**HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:**

Rubi Saikia, Natasha Gohain, Santanu Kr. Sarma. "Attitude towards Anatomy as a Prospective Career among Undergraduate Medical Students". Journal of Evolution of Medical and Dental Sciences 2015; Vol. 4, Issue 41, May 21; Page: 7122-7126, DOI: 10.14260/jemds/2015/1036

**ABSTRACT:** The proportion of medical students opting for anatomy as a prospective career is seen to be very less as compared to those choosing a clinical subject. The study was undertaken to find out the attitudes of undergraduate medical students towards anatomy in comparison to other paraclinical and clinical subjects. A set of questionnaire was given to three hundred undergraduate students and their responses were compiled. Only 9(3%) students opted for anatomy as a career choice. Majority, 239(79.6%) of the students preferred to go for a clinical subject in future. Anatomy also rated poorly in terms of financial benefit & social status. The present study shows that the students possess a negative attitude towards anatomy which needs to be changed urgently.

**KEYWORDS:** Attitude, anatomy, pre & paraclinical, prospective career.

**INTRODUCTION:** Anatomy is one of the basic preclinical subjects offered during first year of MBBS course. A full flagged anatomy department is a must in every medical college, where students dissect, see and learn about the human body under guidance of trained teachers. It has been observed that very few medical students opt for anatomy as a career of choice. In fact, only the graduates with lower rank in postgraduate entrance exam choose anatomy as a last resort. This is of immense concern because the number of qualified teachers in anatomy as well as in other preclinical subjects is gradually decreasing.<sup>(1)</sup> Often, the postgraduate seats in anatomy either go vacant or partially filled. In the light of low recruitment in this subject, this study was carried out among the undergraduate students of Assam Medical College, Dibrugarh, Assam, to know their attitude towards anatomy as a career in future.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS:** The present study was carried out in Assam Medical College, Dibrugarh, Assam. A total of three hundred undergraduate students were selected randomly. This included students from first year to the final year. With the help of persons belonging to departments not included in the present study, they were informed about the study and their verbal consent was taken. In this way, they were kept in dark regarding which department was involved in conducting the study so that they feel free to give their opinion. The students were also assured that the information so collected would be used only for study purpose. Due permission from the concerned authority was taken before commencement of the study. Each student was given a set of questionnaires and were asked to provide a response. The findings were analysed later on.

**RESULT AND OBSERVATIONS:** All the three hundred students returned the completed questionnaires. Among the participants, 146(48.6%) were females and 154(51.3%) were males. They were in the age group of 18 to 24 years. Here's what they said.

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| Pathology | Medicine | Surgery | Anatomy | Obstetrics & Gynaecology | Ophthalmology |
|-----------|----------|---------|---------|--------------------------|---------------|
| 20        | 85       | 81      | 9       | 80                       | 25            |

Table 1: Showing the Subject Preference as a Career

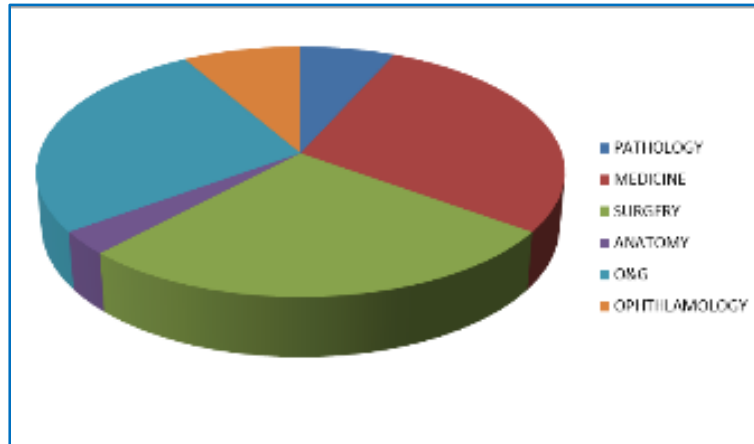


Chart 1

| Interesting subject | Financial benefit | Prestige among the public | Holds a bright future | Patient care | Rapidly advancing |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| 20                  | 146               | 55                        | 34                    | 11           | 34                |

Table 2: Showing the Reason Behind the Chosen Subject

| A clinical subject | A para-clinical subject | A pre-clinical subject | Any subject that I get |
|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 239                | 11                      | 10                     | 40                     |

Table 3: Showing students preference of a career after graduation

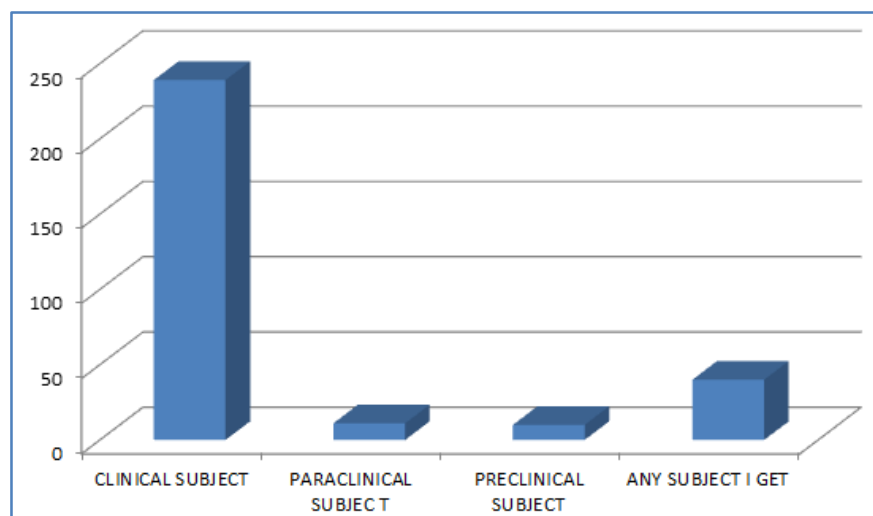


Chart 2

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| They want me to choose a clinical subject | They want me to take up a para-clinical subject | They want me to take up a pre-clinical subject | The choice is totally mine |
|---|---|--|----------------------------|
| 232                                       | 14  | 4  | 50                         |

**Table 4: Showing Families' Influence & Pressure in Choosing a Career**

| Subjects      | Very much | Moderate | Very little |
|---------------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| Pathology     | 53        | 148      | 99          |
| Medicine      | 132       | 147      | 21          |
| Surgery       | 161       | 97       | 42          |
| Anatomy       | 21        | 108      | 171         |
| O & G         | 154       | 117      | 29          |
| Ophthalmology | 91        | 86       | 123         |

**Table 5: Showing Students Likeness for Different Subjects**

In the present study, it was found that majority of the students (79.6%) preferred a clinical subject over para-clinical (3.6%) and pre-clinical (3.3%) subjects as a career in future (Table 3). Infact, anatomy ranked very poorly (3%) as compared to other subjects (Table 1). Students also believe that clinical subjects are financially rewarding, more prestigious and satisfactory. When asked if they will try to take up the subject their family wants for postgraduation, 232(77.3%) students agreed. When asked to estimate the degree to which they like the subjects, anatomy was liked very much by only 21 students (Table 5).

**DISCUSSION:** Though anatomy is one of the basic subjects in medical science, it can be understood from the above observations that the students carry a negative impression of anatomy as compared to other paraclinical and clinical specialities. The non-clinical teaching specialities are opted for by very few students.<sup>(2)</sup> The fresh students don't even mention anatomy as a choice of postgraduation.<sup>(3,4)</sup> The findings of the present study too confirms this fact. This attitude of the students towards anatomy is probably due to the discomfort and uneasiness they experienced during their first year of MBBS course.<sup>(5,6,7,8,9)</sup> In this study, only 9(3%)students opted for anatomy as a career while 10(3.3%)said that they might take up a preclinical subject but not anatomy.<sup>(1)</sup> The possible reason for declining interest in anatomy could be multiple starting with the experience of first year in the dissection hall. This is indeed a matter of concern as it predicts acute shortage of teaching faculty in years to come.<sup>(10)</sup>

Majority of the students, 146(48.6%) opted for a clinical subject as a career because of its financial benefit and prestige in the society.<sup>(11,12,13)</sup> It is true that persons associated with professions involving preclinical subjects experience limited financial returns.<sup>(14)</sup> Moreover, research opportunities in the field of anatomy is very limited in our country which could be yet another reason for not choosing it as a career. If facilities like cytogenetic laboratory is made available in the anatomy department of every medical college, students might start giving it a second thought about anatomy as a prospective career. Efforts should be made to make the students realize that anatomy is a very

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interesting subject and has made tremendous advances over the past few decades. With better understanding of cross-sectional anatomy, neuro-anatomy and embryology, we, the anatomists can help the students overcome the difficulties in becoming a better doctor. This gives as much satisfaction as treating a patient in pain.

**CONCLUSION:** There is a shortage of teachers in preclinical subjects at a global level. The present study indicates that the scarcity of anatomists in India would prevail for many more years to come if immediate measures are not taken to improve the situation. No modern teaching techniques can replace a trained anatomist. To make the subject more interesting among the medical students integrated teaching schedule should be adopted, better research opportunities should be provided, periodical training courses to the teachers should be offered and if possible, some incentives for attending conferences should be granted to the preclinical teachers of all medical colleges across India.

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**FINANCIAL OR OTHER**

**COMPETING INTERESTS:** None

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Date of Submission: 28/04/2015.  
Date of Peer Review: 29/04/2015.  
Date of Acceptance: 13/05/2015.  
Date of Publishing: 19/05/2015.