

The importance of World Anatomy Day and a few examples of activities

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Abstract

At the General Assembly of the 19th International Federation of Associations of Anatomists Congress held in London in 2019, a decision was made to declare October 15th of each year as World Anatomy Day. Recognizing the significance of Andreas Vesalius's contributions, the IFAA designated his death (October 15) anniversary as World Anatomy Day, ensuring that the legacy of this foundational science continues to be celebrated worldwide through various events. The preservation and transmission of valuable traditions are crucial for ensuring that future generations can gain a deeper understanding of the past and present. Consequently, the organization and dissemination of World Anatomy Day activities should be considered a fundamental responsibility for all anatomists.

Keywords: Andreas Vesalius; October 15; World Anatomy Day

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What is World Anatomy Day?

At the General Assembly of the 19th International Federation of Associations of Anatomists (IFAA) Congress held in London in 2019, a decision was made to declare October 15th of each year as World Anatomy Day (WAD). This proposal was initiated by the Turkish Society of Anatomy and Clinical Anatomy, with Prof. Erdogan Sendemir playing a pivotal role. As the president of the society at that time, Prof. Sendemir advocated for a global recognition day to highlight the importance of body donation, which ultimately led to the establishment of WAD.^[1] Of particular note, the WAD logo, employed by the IFAA in all its publications and announcements, was created by Professor Ahmet Sınav, a Turkish anatomist and medical illustrator.

Why October 15?

Andreas Vesalius was a prominent scientist of the 16th century. As a Renaissance physician who believed that the best way to understand human anatomy was through the dissection of human cadavers, Vesalius is renowned as the “father of modern anatomy” due to his groundbreaking work, “De humani corporis Fabrica”, published in 1543. Vesalius passed away on October 15, 1564, at 50.^[2,3] Recognizing

the significance of his contributions, the IFAA designated his death anniversary as World Anatomy Day, ensuring that the legacy of this foundational science continues to be celebrated worldwide through various events.

What Actions Have Been Taken, and What Future Actions Are Possible?

In a 2019 reminder statement, the IFAA outlined recommendations for WAD events. These recommendations included enhancing public awareness of anatomy, promoting the diversity of professions within the discipline, transforming public perception of anatomy, acknowledging donors, potentially addressing the current shortage of donors, and attracting young scientists to the field of anatomical sciences.^[4] Despite being a relatively new initiative, World Anatomy Day is increasingly celebrated yearly through various events held at universities and institutions. National anatomy associations under the IFAA umbrella, anatomy departments, volunteer anatomists, physicians, medical students, and healthcare professionals promote their WAD activities through official and private websites, local and national news outlets, and social media platforms. A case in point is the “Biomedical Visualization” webinar held in India on October 15, 2023, which over 700 participants attended.^[5]

Media coverage of cadavers and body donation during WAD can significantly enhance public awareness of this critical issue. For instance, in Türkiye, during WAD and body donation awareness week, a “Corner of Respect for Silent Teachers of Medicine” was established. This initiative involved gathering the opinions of medical students, academic staff, and administrative personnel regarding cadavers and body donation, answering their questions, conducting a survey, and introducing the body donation form.^[6] In a parallel event at universities in China, medical students commenced their inaugural class with a tribute to their “silent teachers”. Adorned in white coats, they honored the memory of body donors by placing flowers on the memorial wall and observing a moment of silent reflection.^[7] Additionally, during WAD and National Anatomy Week, a social media campaign organized jointly by a student community and the anatomy department of a university addressed questions related to the importance of cadavers in anatomy education, legal and religious aspects of body donation, and cadaver donation practices. An academic from the law faculty provided insights into the legal implications of body donation, while an academic from the theology faculty addressed religious perspectives. Medical students and faculty members from the anatomy department also answered frequently asked questions about body donation.^[8]

A comprehensive overview of World Anatomy Day activities conducted in Malaysia was compiled into an article, with detailed explanations supported by figures. Notable events held in 2019 and 2021 included crossword puzzles, Kahoot! sessions, a “dream wheel” activity, model assembly, an “amazing race” competition, an anatomy clinic exhibition and museum tour, “anatomy fun” activities, and a “quiz let’s play dough” game. In China, on October 15, 2019, the oath ceremony for university students and the official opening of the Anatomy course coincided with World Anatomy Day. To foster greater interest in anatomy, various events were organized, such as anatomy-related exhibitions, conferences, museum visits, and body donation ceremonies. These diverse activities can serve as valuable inspiration for individuals and organizations planning their own World Anatomy Day celebrations.^[9,10]

Efforts should be made to foster participation from both students and the general public. As an example, a museum successfully engaged visitors by providing medical information and organizing entertaining activities centered around anatomical models and skeletal remains.^[11] As part of the World Anatomy Day celebrations in Germany in 2021, opened an exhibition featuring a carefully curated

collection of historical anatomical models and contemporary specimens. This exhibition also included a rare first edition of Andreas Vesalius’s influential work, “*Fabrica*.”^[12]

To broaden the appeal of these events, organizers should consider incorporating sports and arts activities in outdoor settings. As an illustration, a poetry and prose writing competition focused on anatomy was organized, with prizes awarded to the winners.^[13] A “Salute to Netter” drawing competition was organized in 2022 by several universities across China.^[14] Additionally, an international anatomy arts and crafts competition was held during WAD.^[15] Other initiatives included an anatomy quiz, an anatomy exhibition, and a donor appreciation event centered around the theme “Exploring the Human Body: A Journey Through Anatomy”.^[16] Moreover, a university organized a celebration to recognize the achievements of senior anatomists.^[17]

By creating and distributing posters and brochures, various activities are organized to commemorate World Anatomy Day in both academic settings and public spaces. The primary goals of these activities are to raise awareness about anatomy, particularly regarding cadaver and body donation, and to share this information with a wider audience. Additionally, events are organized with the participation of families of donors who have donated their bodies for anatomical study. WAD can serve as a platform for discussing various topics, including the history of anatomy, anatomical terminology, and advancements in anatomical research. A South African university organized a lecture series in 2019 to celebrate World Anatomy Day. The series included a presentation by an emeritus professor on the history of the School of Anatomical Sciences, and talks by junior faculty members exploring the future of anatomy education. In a conference held in Sri Lanka, a faculty member discussed the integration of innovative technologies into anatomy education while emphasizing the continued importance of cadaver dissection.^[1] A virtual symposium held in South Africa to mark World Anatomy Day included a special session focusing on “Women in Anatomy”. Female anatomists discussed the challenges and opportunities they have faced in their field.^[7]

A multidisciplinary approach to anatomical studies can be fostered by collaborating with other medical disciplines. As an example, a medical school in Pakistan hosted a World Anatomy Day event in 2024, which included presentations on “Innovations in Anatomy” and “Surgical Integrations in Anatomy”, organized by the Department of Anatomy and Histology.^[18] For instance, athletes and their coaches from a sports university in a Chinese province participated in World Anatomy Day commemo-

rations by visiting the Life Science Museum.^[14] By providing information to school-aged children, anatomy can be introduced as a fundamental science underlying medicine. Addressing students' questions about the human body, diseases, and the medical profession can inspire them to consider careers in healthcare.

Conclusion

Upholding certain traditions is imperative to ensure that future generations can appreciate the historical and contemporary significance of anatomy. Consequently, the organization and dissemination of WAD activities should be considered a fundamental responsibility of every anatomist. All events must be widely publicized, and announcements on the official websites of the hosting institutions are particularly effective. Furthermore, by aligning academic events such as scientific congresses, symposia, and panels with this date, we can maximize the reach and impact of these activities on a global scale.

Conflict of Interest

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