

Dissecting the Impact of Anatomy Lab Policies on Pregnant Medical Students

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Introduction. Research surrounding the unique occupational hazards facing pregnant medical students is lacking, particularly surrounding pregnant students' exposure to formaldehyde during cadaveric dissection. Formaldehyde is potentially teratogenic and mutagenic and has been associated with spontaneous abortion and birth defects. This project investigated the prevalence and content of policies at U.S. medical schools concerning pregnant students' participation in gross anatomy lab.

Methods. The U.S. News and World Report's top 50 medical schools were systematically reviewed for policies pertaining to pregnant students' participation in gross anatomy lab. Email contact was made with each school to confirm the policy or to inquire whether non-publicly available policies or guidance existed instead.

Results. Among the 50 schools reviewed, 12 (24%) had written policies, 6 (12%) were publicly available, and 6 (12%) had policies obtained via email, while 7 additional schools (14%) responded with unofficial policies or internal guidance used by their anatomy departments. Twenty-nine schools (58%) were categorized as having no policies, of which sixteen were unresponsive to email, one declined participation, and one was excluded. The content and scope of both official and unofficial policies varied widely.

Conclusion. The lack of codified policies at most medical schools regarding safety considerations for pregnant students in gross anatomy lab indicates that more can be done to accommodate this group of students. Creating official, publicly available policies would promote a more inclusive environment for these trainees and signal to students that the institution is prepared to support them should they become pregnant during medical school.