Aims and Objectives

• Measure baseline attitudes of 2nd year medical students toward different views of death.

• Determine medical students’ understanding of the current medico-legal standards of death.

• Investigate how increased awareness of the history, application, and current debate surrounding various views of death affects students’ attitudes toward surrogates who hold non-standard views of death.

Methods

• Deliver an 80-minute comprehensive philosophy of death lecture for second year medical students during a neuroscience course

• Distribute survey and collect data before and after lecture to assess change in student attitudes and knowledge

Disclosures

The authors have no disclosures to report.

Introduction

The pluralism of views that surround death, both within the bioethics community and society as a whole, can be a source of frustration for medical students and physicians who encounter surrogate decision makers who deny the standard medico-legal view of death. There are large gaps in knowledge regarding brain death among medical students, likely due to the lack of educational initiatives and the reliance of media for information, which often portrays inaccurate descriptions of brain death.2 Despite the growing literature on the inadequacy of medical students’ knowledge of brain death, there has yet to be investigation into students’ attitudes toward brain death and other, non-standard views of death.2 Therefore, we developed a lecture with an accompanying questionnaire to determine students’ knowledge and attitudes for different views of death.

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Conclusions

• Less than half of students understood the language of the current medico-legal standard of death before attending the lecture.

• Although students were less frustrated and more accepting of the high brain view of death after the lecture, their attitude did not change for removing a ventilator.

• Students were less likely to accommodate a request to keep a brain dead patient on a ventilator despite not having changes in frustration or acceptability toward the circulatory view.

Discussion

Our data shows that pre-clinical medical students have a lack of understanding for the current medico-legal standards of death. The shifts in students’ attitudes toward the three different views of death suggests that early educational interventions the philosophy of death facilitates student reflection on their own understanding and opinion of the definition of death. Furthermore, students were less frustrated with the high brain view and found it more acceptable than the circulatory view, despite both being non-standard views of death. This may indicate that students have a “neuro-centric” view of death that holds higher brain function as more critical to life than cardiopulmonary function.

References
