

Revisiting Historical Illustrations in the Age of Digital Anatomy Education

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Abstract : In the contemporary study of anatomy, medical students utilize a diverse array of resources, including lab handouts, lectures, and, increasingly, digital media such as interactive anatomy apps and digital images. Notably, a significant shift has occurred, with fewer students possessing traditional anatomy atlases or books, reflecting a broader trend towards digital approaches like Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, and web-based programs. This paper seeks to explore the evolution of anatomy education by contrasting current digital tools with historical resources, such as classical anatomical illustrations and atlases, to assess their relevance and potential benefits in modern medical education. Through a comprehensive literature review, the development of anatomical illustrations is traced from the textual descriptions of Galen to the detailed and artistic representations of Da Vinci, Vesalius, and later anatomists. The examination includes how the printing press facilitated the dissemination of anatomical knowledge, transforming covert dissections into public spectacles and formalized teaching practices. Historical illustrations, often influenced by societal, religious, and aesthetic contexts, not only served educational purposes but also reflected the prevailing medical knowledge and ethical standards of their times. Critical questions are raised about the place of historical illustrations in today's anatomy curriculum. Specifically, their potential to teach critical thinking, highlight the history of medicine, and offer unique insights into past societal conditions are explored. These resources are viewed in their context, including the lack of diversity and the presence of ethical concerns, such as the use of illustrations from unethical sources like Pernkopf's atlas. In conclusion, while digital tools offer innovative ways to visualize and interact with anatomical structures, historical illustrations provide irreplaceable value in understanding the evolution of medical knowledge and practice. The study advocates for a balanced approach that integrates traditional and modern resources to enrich medical education, promote critical thinking, and provide a comprehensive understanding of anatomy. Future research should investigate the optimal combination of these resources to meet the evolving needs of medical learners and the implications of the digital shift in anatomy education.

Keywords : human anatomy, historical illustrations, historical context, medical education

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