

Full transcript - Interview with Dr. Olusegun Oyedele

Courteney: I had a conversation with a Faculty member of UBC's Medical School, to find out about the Body Donation Program from a professor's perspective.

Dr. Oyedele: Hello everyone, my name is Olusegun Oyedele, and I am an associate professor of teaching in the Department of Cellular and Physiological Sciences at the University of British Columbia, located at UBC Okanagan, which is located in Kelowna, at the southern medical program.

Courteney: What was your introduction to body donation?

Dr. Oyedele: My introduction to body donation was actually in Africa, in South Africa to be precise. In Johannesburg, at my old university, University of the Witwatersrand, where I worked in the Anatomy department. So I was a member of staff, I taught Anatomy, and when I inquired about how we sourced the bodies that we used for teaching in the Department of Anatomy, I was told that we got the majority of them from people who donated their bodies to science. So that was my first introduction.

Courteney: You probably do get approached from time to time from people who are just sort of curious, or would like to know more about that. How do you explain the importance of body donation to others?

Dr. Oyedele: The way I explain is that it is something that our healthcare professionals need. It is a fundamental need. Sometimes I compare it to, if we did not have body donation, if our students did not have the ability to learn from a cadaver and from donors, I compare it to losing a sense. Losing say it like a sense of touch, or hearing, or feeling, or smell. It is really a fundamental way that our students learn, and it is something we hope people will respond to.

So I tell people if you are considering, please go ahead, sign the papers, fill the forms, and please inform your next of kin that this has been your decision. It's something that we will always treasure and value as the University of British Columbia.

Courteney: On that topic of just discussing the whole idea of death, and body donation to science... I mean it could be a tough sell for some people if they just would not have ever thought of it, or maybe it's not quite something they would consider. Where do you think this reluctance comes from?

Dr. Oyedele: I think people have just never thought about it. I don't think it's something people think about. People think about perhaps cremation, or burial after they are gone. It's not out there in the general consciousness of individuals in the community, that this was an option. And so because it's not out there as an option, it's not something people are used to. People always fall back from what they're not used to. Also maybe, with this sense of uncertainty, they wonder

what is going to happen? How does it work? What is actually going to happen? And so that sense of uncertainty sometimes creates a reluctance. But if we're able to set their mind at ease, if you're able to tell them how much of a valued resource this is, it would tell them that, in fact, what they are doing, they are creating a legacy. People like to know that they are creating a legacy, that they are doing something that would save another life, doing something that would impact the health of somebody else. A doctor that has learned from their bodies will use that knowledge that they have in a multiplied way.

So that one donation will save many, many lives. That's what I try to impart. I try to emphasize, the knowledge I tried to impart to people, is that you are actually creating a legacy. You are saving not just one, but in fact, many lives. That the doctors that are learning from your body will be able to use that knowledge then to affect the health of the community as a whole.

Courteney: So in the end, it could be a cyclical process in a way? So from a donated body, a student gets the opportunity to learn, they take that experience into what area their career is, and then down the line perhaps they would decide to donate their bodies? And then it just the cycle kind of continues? Is that sort of an accurate idea?

Dr. Oyedele: Absolutely. It is very accurate. In fact, you and I would know this, that at our University our students actually organize a memorial, a remembrance for the donors that have kindly donated their bodies. And some of the testimonials that you'll find, is that even some of our medical students decided to go into medicine because a relative of theirs, their grandfather donated their body to the medical program. And that's so inspiring, like "*Oh if my father could do this, if my grandfather could do this, I am also going to dedicate my life to helping and to serving the community, and I want to become a doctor*". So we can see how that one gift has now ricocheted, if you like, has now actually affected their own member of their family, who now is dedicating their life to save other lives. And so, yes, it comes full circle, and we see these often.

Courteney: As a Professor, what is the difference between learning and teaching Anatomy from a donated body, as opposed to a textbook, or some kind of artificial model?

Dr. Oyedele: There are so so many differences. The advantages that I see in the uniqueness of Body Donation are manyfold. I will mention a few of them.

First and foremost is the fact that the human body is so variable. We are distinct individuals and no one body is the same as the other. So to learn about that variation in human anatomy, students need to be exposed to actual donors. In the pictures and images they see in textbooks, they are all the same. So that exposure in variation that exists in nature from one individual to the other, will only be learned when students learn the anatomy from actual donors. That's number one.

Secondly, we like to say in education that students should be exposed to education in the same context in which they will practice that knowledge that they get. And so, the students will be taught, and will eventually be treating human beings. They should learn anatomy from human beings. That is a real scientific and proven method of learning and of practice. They are not going to be treating textbooks. They are going to be treating humans so they need to learn the anatomy from humans.

A third reason is haptics, the sense of touch. How something feels, you only get a feel for what part of the human body and nerve, for example, or muscle, feels like when you actually touch the actual human nerve and human muscle. Healthcare professionals that we are training hopefully will be treating human beings. From the majority of the practice, they will be touching human beings. The first exposure to what that feels like is when they actually look at the human feel and touch. Those same human beings in the anatomy dissection room, where they are actually exposed to those donors. The authenticity of practice, of learning, is made much more real.

Courteney: Respect and dignity are at the core of this program, how do you see this in the work that you do?

Dr. Oyedele: I see it all the time. First and foremost, like I said, at that first encounter that our students have with the donor and from the culture that we create around the use of their bodies of our donors. Our students approach working with cadavers, with donors, with respect. Also, we have rules in the anatomy lab, about how to dress. So for example, we do not allow baseball caps or any other clothing like that. Students must show respect to the donors. We also emphasize the individuality of our donors. The tissue of your donor must remain with that donor. We try to inculcate that in our students. That this donor is an individual, with a history, with a story, and at all times they should respect the tissues and the parts of the body that belong to that individual as belonging to that individual and remaining with that individual all the time. And students take that to heart. Oh, sorry for the pun!

Our students, you know, really put that into practice in their work, and it is something that stays with them. It is something they take away right from the anatomy room to their clinical learning, when they begin to learn in the hospitals, and furthermore into their clinical practice when they become doctors themselves. So yes, there is a culture of respect, a culture of dignity, a culture of value that surrounds each and every one of our donors.

Courteney: Now during COVID-19, there was a decrease in the number of donations that UBC had but need for the access to bodies didn't necessarily decrease, because there were still classes happening, just maybe virtually. What was the impact on student learning during that time?

Dr. Oyedele: The impact was tremendous, I would say, sadly. Because our students then had to learn from three-dimensional images, three-dimensional images that were scanned. Also from diagrams in anatomy atlases, textbooks. So they had to make use of the other media that we have, videos of dissections, which were different, a far cry from the actual specimen of anatomy of human donors themselves. So we saw that even the students began to clamor to get back into the anatomy lab, they began to demand to get back to the anatomy lab, they began to actually worry that their learning is being adversely affected and they let us know.

Courteney: What would happen if people just stopped donating?

Dr. Oyedele: Sadly, we will of course have to revert to other methods, similar to what we did during COVID-19. If people stopped donating, the donation program would have to stop and come to an end. And for me, as an Anatomy Professor, that is very sad. A sad thing to

contemplate. Where people will no longer be able to learn from actual human material and so I hope that never happens. It would be the end of learning Anatomy as we currently do.

Courteney: I think the bottom line getting the word out about Body Donation is a pretty high priority, would you agree?

Dr. Oyedele: Absolutely, it is a pretty high priority, and I really hope that you and your colleagues will help to spread the word that this is a very needed, fundamentally needed result in the training of healthcare professionals. And we would really urge the community out there to please consider donating their bodies to our Body Donation Program.

Courteney: If you could sum up our experience with the program in one word, what would that word be?

Dr. Oyedele: Wow. I have many words, but if I could sum that up in one word...I would say legacy. I have mentioned that word legacy, I think that's one word that I would use because it is an uncanny, and it's almost profound. Profound how death results in life. How someone who has died can then live on, in the hands, and the heart of our students, as they go about practicing their medicine over many years. And so I would say that our donors actually create legacy with that donation. And so that's one big word that I would use to summarize our body donation program.

Courteney: Thank you so much for spending some time with us and sharing your experience and your insight on body donation. It's a valuable perspective and really appreciate hearing it, and hopefully, this will give something to people to think about, and something to consider. We can continue on the legacy.

Dr. Oyedele: *I hope so. Thank you so much Courteney.*

Courteney: Thank you.

Dr. Oyedele: *It has been a pleasure to talk to you. Thank you.*