

How do we know what aspects of gross anatomy to teach to our students? Can core syllabuses for the anatomical sciences be developed and accepted?

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There is increasingly a call for clinical relevance in the teaching of the biomedical sciences within all health care programmes. This presupposes that there is an understanding of what is “core” material within the curriculum. To date, the anatomical sciences have been poorly served by the development of core syllabuses, although there have been commendable attempts to define a core syllabus for gross anatomy in medicine and for some medical specialties. The International Federation of Associations of Anatomists (IFAA) and of the European Federation for Experimental Morphology (EFEM) aims to formulate, on an international basis, core syllabuses for all branches of the anatomical sciences. This is being undertaken at the initial stage using Delphi Panels consisting of a team of anatomists, scientists and clinicians who evaluate syllabus content and accord each element/topic “essential”, “important”, “acceptable” or “not required” status. Their initial conjectures, published on the IFAA website, provide merely a framework to enable anatomical (and other cognate learned) societies and individual anatomists, clinicians and students to comment upon the syllabuses. Here is presented the concepts and methodological approaches underlying the hybrid Delphi process employed. Preliminary findings relating to the development of a neuroanatomy core syllabus are provided to illustrate the methods initially employed by a Delphi Panel. The approach is novel in that it is international in scope, is conceptually democratic, and is developmentally fluid in terms of availability for amendment. The aim is to set internationally recognized standards and thus to provide guidelines concerning anatomical knowledge when engaged in course development.