

## EDITORIAL

### POST-MORTEM AND TISSUE DONATIONS

It may not be universally acceptable that the best study of study is man, but it seems above dispute that the only reliable way to study the structure and workings of the human body is to do it on the human body itself. It is agreed that a substantial amount of knowledge in physiology and other human-orientated sciences has been built up from the study of animals other than man, and it is also not denied that mice, rabbits, dogs, horses and other non-human organisms, big or small, have all contributed to our knowledge of ourselves. Nevertheless, without the dissections on countless human cadavers, both in the course of studies in anatomy and pathology, our knowledge of gross structure of man would not be what it is today. This study has been made in the past through fair means and foul—at times on condemned prisoners with the blessings of law and society or bodies donated by enlightened people, and at others on specimens procured by body snatchers whose nefarious activities ironically assisted to a large extent in making such important names in medicine like Munro. As long as medical knowledge has hiatus of ignorance—this is still very prominent at present, in spite of self-satisfied claims of modern doctors that we have made more important advances in medicine in the last 50 years than all those made in the last few thousand years—it will remain necessary that examination of cadavers and human experiments of a restricted sort be continued. Hence it must be stressed again and again that public acceptance or rejection of post mortem examination can make or mar medical progress.

In the recent few years, a new advance in medicine has made the appeal to the public to accept post mortem operations more compelling. This is the possibility of organ and tissue transplant. The dead man's eye, seeing no more and doomed to decay and putrefaction, is now suddenly valuable again in that if removed early enough after death, it can confer sight to the living blind. Similarly, his kidneys, bones, cartilage, blood vessels and endocrinal glands need not have to die with him, but may be salvaged to prolong the life of others. Hearts, lungs and livers too may soon be of life-saving value. A man, then, cannot be so poor that he has nothing to leave behind him, for even his remains can benefit posterity. Surely, not a single thinking man nowadays can possibly be insistent that with his passing, his remains should be permitted to go to dust, when they may in fact bring light to two persons, and health to many more.

In some countries, when a man enters a hospital, he is presumed to have agreed to a post mortem examination unless he specifically expresses himself in writing to the contrary. It is time that the local public too should take stock of the potentialities and revise its attitude towards post mortem examinations. This year, the laws of Singapore have been amended so that the bequest of bodies after death may be done during life. Everyone now has the chance to do his bit for society, for in signing away his body after his demise, he has in fact given a new lease of life to someone else!

Gwee Ah Leng

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