

## **Interview with Dr Amanda Meyer**

### **Short Introduction**

#### **Fabio Quondamatteo**

Hello everyone and welcome to our interview series on how body donation for anatomical examination is regulated in the various countries.

Today, we have the pleasure of hosting Dr Amanda Mayer, who is senior lecturer in the University of WA in Perth.

Doctor Mayer will take us through the regulation of anatomical donation in Australia now.

Doctor Mayer, please introduce yourself and tell us briefly about your past experience in being involved with cadaveric anatomy activities and your current involvement in anatomy activities.

#### **Amanda Meyer**

Thanks for having me.

So I'm a senior lecture and I've been teaching anatomy for 12 years at university level.

In my previous post I was the what we call the anatomical license holder, and that is the person who is a delegate of the Department of Health of WA, and they're in charge of anatomy at one institute.

And so that was my role at my previous institution.

Now I'm back, at the University of WA, where I did my studies as a student 25 years ago and I am a senior lecturer here, but I am not the anatomical license holder here.

So I come under my head of school.

Who is the license holder and that license holder is then reporting to the Department of Health, which is one of our government departments in WA.

#### **Fabio Quondamatteo**

Thank you very much, Doctor Meyer.

We will hear more about these in the full interview, which will be published on the EFEM website, and you can follow the link associated with this video to view the full interview.

Thank you very much and thanks for sharing your expertise with us.

### **Full Interview**

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#### **Paula Garcia Lopez**

So let's begin.

My first question is how long has body donation for anatomical examination been active in your country and how widespread would you say the knowledge is that it is a possibility?

#### **Amanda Meyer**

That's a great question.

Because Australia is relatively young in its universities, we really haven't had anatomy education here very long.

I think the earliest was 1862, the University of Melbourne opened up and had anatomy professor.

So all basically all of the states of Australia are very slowly got universities, but all of the universities were infiltrated by professors from England or Scotland who all came over and kind of populated and started all of our university anatomy schools.

It's not very well known.

I don't think outside of universities, that body donation is a possibility for people, and there's no adverts on TV for there is for body donation or you know things for kidneys donation or corneal or putting it on your driver's license.

But there is no statewide or Australia wide push for people to donate their bodies for medical science or education.

### **Paula Garcia Lopez**

Yeah, I think that that's probably common in many countries.

So the next question is how?

Who can accept a donation and how many donation centers are there in Australia?

### **Amanda Meyer**

Yeah.

Another great question.

So are there not the numbers off the top of my head, but I do know that the only places that can accept body donations are what are deemed to be schools of anatomy.

And so that is not every university.

That's some universities, and I know in Australia I think we have about 7 actual departments of anatomy and then all the rest of the departments of anatomy are inside other schools in other universities.

So is usually one institution per state.

So we have seven States and territories.

So I would say there would be 7 centres in Australia that can accept body donations and my university of WA is the only one in WA.

We have the largest land mass.

They have about 1/3 of the country that we serviced.

### **Paula Garcia Lopez**

Great.

Thank you.

So if someone were to want to donate their body, what would they have to do?

### **Amanda Meyer**

So they would need to contact the Body donation program at whichever institute in whichever state that they're in, we have a person who runs the body donation program here at the University of WA.

That person is a full-time person that's in charge with getting people to or to register their intent to be a body donor and then to discuss that with that person and then also make arrangements with their families.

### **Paula Garcia Lopez**

So would this person have to go through this process themselves during their life or could a family member or friend possibly do that after their death?

**Amanda Meyer**

No, so here we have to have the person whose body it is.

They have to give written consent that they're going to donate their body and that needs to be witnessed.

So it needs to be made sure that this person is sound of mind and that they are making this informed consent.

**Paula Garcia Lopez**

Yes.

Thank you.

That's great.

And we mentioned earlier about organ donation.

So is body donation for anatomical examination compatible with organ donation and is it compatible with postmortem examination?

**Amanda Meyer**

OK.

So generally, we would say body donation cannot happen if there has been a donation of organs.

The only exception to that rule is if someone has donated their cornea, so if their corneas are donated then the rest the whole body can then go through the body donation process.

But if any other organ has been removed, then that nullifies that process postmortems and in WA goes straight to the Coroners Office and say that is a different department in the government and the Department of Health.

So they never come to the university.

**Paula Garcia Lopez**

That makes sense.

Thank you.

So umm, just moving on to more of the infrastructure of anatomy centers.

Sorry, could you briefly just mention what costs are involved in running a body donation program in Australia?

**Amanda Meyer**

OK, so I don't have specifics, but I would say that there would be many people involved with this process because you would need administration staff to liaise with the families.

We would need transport people to bring the bodies to the university.

Then we've got the technicians that prepare the bodies.

Then we have prosectors or dissectors that dissect the body.

Then we have the technicians.

After the body has been used, they would.

Then and need to transport that body back to a Funeral Home.

And then that Funeral Home would then cremate those remains.

And then they would be interred in the cemetery.

So within those processes, of course, there's going to be other costs with preparing the body.

There will be a lot of costs involved with chemicals and disposing of biological waste, so that would be a high, quite high cost there.

**Paula Garcia Lopez**

Thank you.

So which information is requested from a potential donor in Australia, and is there acceptance criteria?

**Amanda Meyer**

Each state has its own criteria, but in WA I don't believe we have a really strong what needs to be met to be included.

So we have exclusion criteria, so if you have an infectious disease or you've had recent surgery or you've had some other.

Recent surgeries and things like that that nullifies your ability to become a body donor.

And there's also, I think if people have lived or if they lived in the UK between 1980 and 1996 because of the Creutzfeld Jacob transmission.

So all of those things preclude people from donating, which is of course, why when COVID, when people started dying of COVID, we did shut down our program and that remained closed for quite a significant amount of time.

**Paula Garcia Lopez**

Again, that makes a lot of sense.

So if someone were to donate their body, how long are they remains allowed to be kept within an anatomical institution before they're buried or cremated?

**Amanda Meyer**

So generally when we get people they have to have died, as you know, less than three days prior.

So they come in, and as natural body temperature, we will then either use them fresh and that will be for the medical doctors who will be performing surgeries on fresh cadavers in the etc, which is the Surgical Technical Education Center, which is next door to our department.

Otherwise, they're embalmed or frozen, so the ones that are embalmed are embalmed in formalin, which is a fixative. As you all know, and they are in fixative for quite a few months before we bring them out to dissect them for the anatomical education.

**Paula Garcia Lopez**

And that's like, thank you.

Do you have any regulations for imaging in Australia?

**Amanda Meyer**

I'm not sure we have so many different laws across the country. In WA, our Anatomy Act was actually established in 1930.

We didn't even have an anatomy school in 1930, but there were plans to have one, so they got the legislation, put three first and of course in 1930 there was no cameras or iPads in and the anatomy space.

So we don't have any mention of images being recorded or captured in our current legislation, but in 2016, I did work with a number of people to get legislation put to Parliament that will include imaging and that is still sitting in the Parliament's desk, so that hasn't been legislated into law yet.

So I think what we do in WA is that we take this at a school level or university level and because universities and anatomy is a very regulated process, we will keep all of those images on a password protected server.

And when you see anatomy departments, you don't realise you see them because they're all behind glass frosted doors.

So everything in WA to do with cadaveric images is very much behind closed doors and is only open for students and staff to be able to use those.

**Paula Garcia Lopez**

Great.

Thank you.

So what would happen to a body after anatomical examination has been completed.

**Amanda Meyer**

So once we've used them, so we can use them either immediately or they can go back after six months, or we will retain the bodies for up to 60 months, which is 5 years.

So then at the end of that time, a majority of the body is then returned to the crematorium and it's cremated and the ashes are either given back to the family.

If that's the families wishes or they get scatted into a special garden that's in the Karrakatta Cemetery.

**Paula Garcia Lopez**

So moving on, which regulatory body oversees Anatomical examination and what's the procedure for this in WA?

**Amanda Meyer**

So yeah, in WA it's by the Department of Health.

So that is a government body each year or every few years there's a different person who is the inspector of anatomy.

I'm not sure who that person is right now because I'm not the the license holder, but they come around once a year, they do a surprise spot inspection and so they will turn up to one of the universities that have cadavers at them, and they will check the storage of the cadavers.

They would check the teaching spaces and they would check that the students are all wearing their lab coats with their student cards showing their name, and that everyone is behaving, you know, respectful manner.

**Paula Garcia Lopez**

Yes, we'll circle back to how important it is to be professional anatomy room in a second, but just before we get there. Well, you mentioned the Department of Health, but if you wouldn't mind just mentioning how licensing is regulated at the level of individual institutions in one in WA.

**Amanda Meyer**

All right. Yes.

So, the Department of Health Is the overarching body that then nominates a licensee or a anatomical license holder at each Institution that has one.

So my boss, who's the head of school here, he is the current anatomical.

License holder. He's not an anatomist.

He's our head of school and at other institutions in WA it's usually an anatomist that holds that position.

But because our school used to be the school of anatomy and is now the School of Human Sciences, we do is just sticks with the head of school.

So then it's that license holder who then has to make sure that any student that is coming into that anatomy room needs to be able to behave in a professional manner.

And so usually there will be a little couple of lines of you will do this.

Me won't do that.

And then you will kind of send that off to students in their learning management system.

They'll tick off on that and then you'll say, OK, you're now approved to enter into the anatomy facility.

**Paula Garcia Lopez**

Yeah, that makes sense.

And you mentioned students, technicians and many other members of staff.

So who else would be able to learn from these donated bodies?

**Amanda Meyer**

So we have a lot of different students coming through our lab, so the core or the largest body of students for us is our science students and our biomedical science students.

Then it would be the medical students who are outside of our school, but they come into our labs to learn anatomy.

Then we also have some physiotherapy students from a different university who come here because they don't have a human anatomy lab.

We have some ambulance people coming and doing some training here.

We have lots of different groups that come in because there's so few labs in WA.

**Paula Garcia Lopez**

OK.

And just to conclude our interview, you mentioned earlier how important it is to keep a professional behaviour in an anatomy room, right?

So could you briefly just highlight in a few words again how important it is really to be respectful of our donors?

**Amanda Meyer**

Yes.

So my view is that it's essential to be respectful to these donors because they have given us the ultimate gift.

So this is something that I always impress upon my students right from the first lab that we're always dealing with a person, and we need to be very respectful because otherwise we won't have this gift given to us.

**Paula Garcia Lopez**

Yes, I agree completely.

Thank you very much.

So that concludes our interview.

And again, thank you for coming here today.

I really hope you enjoyed this, and we certainly did.

**Amanda Meyer**

Thanks for having me.