Nerve Surgeons’ Assessment of the Role of Eduard Pernkopf's Atlas of Topographic and Applied Human Anatomy in Surgical Practice

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INTRODUCTION

• Pernkopf’s Atlas of Anatomy is controversial due to its origination during the Third Reich, yet has surgical application by depicting intricate nerve anatomy.
• Inquiries in the 1980’s resulted in the Senatorial Project of the University of Vienna (1998) and subsequent removal of the atlas from print, though it continues to circulate in the used book market without disclosure.
• The purpose of this study is to (1) assess the role of Pernkopf’s atlas in nerve surgeons’ current practice and determine whether an ethical proposal may provide possible guidance for its use in surgery and surgical education.

MATERIALS & METHODS

• An electronic questionnaire was sent to members of the American Society for Peripheral Nerve (ASPN) and PASSIO Education (passioeducation.com).
• The survey introduced respondents to the origin of Pernkopf’s atlas, assessed surgical utility, and asked for recommendations on ethical handling.
• This involved the development of a 4-point proposal to address current issues as part of an international effort (see “Survey Questions” table).

RESULTS (Demographics)

• 206 responses were collected (25% response rate, 77% completion rate).
• 83% male, 17% female; 26-73 years old.
• 15% resident physicians, 11% fellows, 74% practicing surgeons.
• 61% received residency training in plastic & reconstructive surgery.

Pleasesee the following tables & figures for survey answers regarding patterns of use, whether or not to use Pernkopf’s atlas in nerve surgery (including the four-point proposal), Netter’s versus Pernkopf’s anatomical plate comparison, and type of anatomical atlases used in nerve surgery.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

• This is the first discussion regarding whether “to use or not to use” Pernkopf’s atlas in nerve surgery.
• The 4-point ethical proposal improved acceptance regarding the use of the atlas in surgery under specific guidelines (Fig. 1).
• A transition of 76% of “uncomfortable” and “undecided” to possible atlas use occurred with the proposal.
• 29% of respondents would use Pernkopf’s atlas regardless of the ethical proposal.
• Netter’s represents the most popular atlas (81%), while only 22% prefer Pernkopf’s (though voted superior in anatomical detail and surgical utility).
• There continues to exist a division in opinion on whether this detailed atlas can be used to benefit the lives of patients in surgery and education.