Gharpure’s Papers (1927–1951) on Autopsies at Grant Medical College and Sir J. J. Hospital, Mumbai

To the Editor.—We read with interest the article by Lanjewar et al.1 on the 79 autopsy registers of the Grant Medical College (GMC) and J. J. Hospital (1884–1966), and laud their effort in retrieving seemingly lost data. However, some errors need to be addressed.

Also see p. 644.

The authors state that the data in these registers “were never published.” They are correct in the sense that the entire set of autopsy records for that period has not been published. Yet, it is pertinent to note that the data have been used in considerable part for many other published studies. The authors have entirely overlooked the pioneering work of P. V. Gharpure (1896–1966) of the Pathology Department, GMC, Bombay (now Mumbai), based on the same material used by Lanjewar et al.1 Purushottam Vishwanath Gharpure, MD, DTM&H (London), was a pathologist, professor, and emeritus professor at GMC from 1927–1951. Subsequently, he was officer-in-charge at the Polio Research Unit of the Indian Council of Medical Research in the same department. He was one of the founders of the Association of Teaching Pathologists, Bombay, and also president of Indian Association of Pathologists and Microbiologists in 1955.

Gharpure2 had noted, in a historical review of the Pathology Department of the GMC, published in 1951: “Records from 1872 of post-mortem done by several teachers have been carefully preserved and these will show the high standard of descriptions attained then… There were many autopsies. All permanent records were written up by the students, till 1932. All records from 1872 are available and all records have been indexed.”

In 1928, he had authored a tabulated analysis of “material available… from the year 1877 [which] comprises records of properly recorded post-mortem examinations, numbering over six thousand.” He concluded, “This paper may be taken as only a preliminary contribution to this subject, which is very vast… especially when the sources of the material are so complex.”

His cue was the analysis of post-mortem studies conducted by Sir Leonard Rogers, FRS, FRCP, FRCS, at the Medical College, Calcutta. Rogers (1868–1962), a major-general in the Indian Medical Service, was professor of pathology at Calcutta Medical College, and subsequently a founder of the Calcutta School of Tropical Medicine. Such studies were useful in region-wide comparisons of diseases such as splenomegaly.4 In 1931, Gharpure and Saldanha5 reported large-scale autopsy-derived information on amebiasis in Bombay. Gharpure6–8 also published data on cancer as well as on cirrhosis of the liver in India, based on the autopsy material at GMC.

Gharpure9 also published an article on pernicious anemia. This article includes photomicrographs of histopathologic evaluation at autopsy. This is unusual because, as Lanjewar et al.1 point out, autopsy histology was started only in 1949. Finally, Gharpure (with Jhala)10–12 also used the findings at autopsy to determine the weights of the heart, brain, and other organs in Indians.

Lanjewar et al1 refer to “Sir (sic) Waldemar Mordechai Wolff Haffkine.” A knighthood was never conferred on Waldemar Mordecai Haffkine. He was awarded a Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire, at Queen Victoria’s awards honors in 1897.13

Finally, Lanjewar et al1 refer to Robert Koch’s visit to Bombay and a report in The Times of India on “Koch’s room” on the campus of Grant Medical College. We do know that Koch visited Bombay in 1897 as a member of the German Plague Commission.14 However, it is unlikely that Robert Koch ever worked in the purported “Koch’s room” in the old Pathology Building. That building dates from 1910.15 There is no documented evidence of the existence of a Koch’s room elsewhere in the college.

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12. Gharpure PV, Jhala Hl. The ratio of the body weight to the weights of the organs part IV: the kidneys, the spleen, the liver, the lungs, the pancreas, the pituitary, the suprarenals, the thyroid and the testes. Ind Med Gaz. 1952;87(11):487–491.

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In Reply.—We thank Pandya et al for their interest in our article1 and their comments. To begin, we express our gratitude to Dr Purushottam Vishwanath Gharpure, MD, of Grant Medical College (GMC) (now Grant Government Medical College) and Sir J. J. Hospital (JJH) Mumbai, India, for his