

Two clichés made real... for Everybody.

Two great clichés about lecturing focus on clothing, or rather the lack of it. One is a piece of advice often given to novice speakers who feel intimidated by the audience: 'imagine that the audience is naked'. Oft-repeated though the advice is, I have never been convinced that it would be helpful. When we are wearing our teaching hats, imagining our students naked would be horrendously inappropriate and, I assume, potentially distracting. When we are wearing our research hats and facing a conference audience, there are other problems:



Image credit: Scott Adams: see <http://dilbert.com/>

The other cliché is the pre-lecture nightmare of a nervous lecturer... dreaming of being on stage teaching, without having remembered to put any clothes on. I don't think I have yet had this particular nightmare, but it is common enough for Jorge Cham to use it in one of his excellent Piled Higher and Deeper cartoons:



Image credit: Jorge Cham, see <http://www.phdcomics.com/comics.php>

To my surprise, a local event driven by some of our imaginative and energetic medical students has made both of these clichés of lectures come true, at the same time, and with a photographer around

to capture the event.

The broad context of the event is a shortage of organs and tissues available for transplantation. This topic is close to my own heart – after all, my lab has been for years trying to build kidneys from stem cells partly to address this very problem. Currently there is, in Scotland, a public health campaign called *We Need Everybody*, designed to encourage more people to register their wish that, when they die, their organs may be used to prolong the lives of others. The campaign (see Links below) has been accompanied by television advertisements and posters in which various residents of Scotland – people with bodies of all sorts and ages and not just young super-model types – appear naked (with objects of everyday life being placed strategically to avoid offending public decency), and speak up for organ donation. This national campaign has been reflected locally by various groups of people, including but not restricted to patient groups and campaigners, holding their own photo-shoots with carefully placed 'We Need Everybody' publicity boards being used to maintain sufficient decorum for the photos to be used anywhere. Boards used for some photos were small but others - including those used for the photo chosen to accompany this article, you will be relieved to know - were very large.

In Edinburgh medical school, students spend most of their time following a prescribed medical course but at certain points they have time to undertake Student Selected Components ('SSC's in the local lingo). Their first taste of this, in year 1, allows groups of students to organize themselves to do almost anything with a medical connection; the point is the development of skills in teamwork, organization and presentation so the actual topic is not too important and varies enormously. This year, the students of one SSC group decided that they would organize a campaign to persuade as many medical students as possible that they should consider post-mortem organ donation by creating the medical school's own *We Need Everybody* event. The first that I heard of this was when a future doctor in this SSC group sent me an e-mail explaining their aim, accompanied by a photograph of herself on the top of Arthur's Seat (Edinburgh's local mountain), the University behind her in the distance, and a photo-shopped pale green rectangle with 'weneedeverbody.org' on it between her outstretched hands, covering just enough of her unclothed body for the photo to be 'safe for work'. Impressively, this photo was taken with the air temperature at about -1°C! Her e-mail explained that the students in the group considered Year 1's Academic Director (ie me) and Administrator (the wonderful Hedwig) to be part of the year... so were inviting us to take our clothes off with them and to be part of at least one photoshoot.

It was in a way really nice that the students view us as part of the year (rather than its main adversaries), but the invitation nevertheless came as a surprise! I did a little nude modelling for an artist friend when I was a student myself, but that was a long time ago - at my age I do not normally even remove my jacket. But, when I teach the first years embryology, and end the series of lectures with pictures of adult development and ageing, I invite them to recognize that there is a dignity to the human frame at all ages, and that we should view all bodies with humility, reverence and awe, as scientists, as clinicians and as fellow human beings. If I indulged any silly self-consciousness about middle age and refused to join the brave and enthusiastic students, who had already shown their willingness to undress in all sorts of unexpected places for the charity photo-shoots, I would have undermined all I had told them and actually believe. So of course I said yes.

Given how the students are used to meeting me, they planned a session in Edinburgh's famous Victorian Anatomy Lecture Theatre, a location that has a lot of atmosphere and, usefully, no windows. Also, if there is one place that nobody could object to unusual exposure of human bodies, it is surely an anatomy lecture theatre! With precautionary 'filming in progress' notes on the entrance doors, we 'borrowed' the place one lunchtime, quickly undressed, and took up our usual places, me in the teaching area at the bottom and the students in the steeply-raked seats.



Professor bemused...



and students amused: situation normal.

The student tasked with being photographer for that day handed us *We Need Everybody* boards of various sizes (the photo on the left is one using the largest sort, safer for the web) and adjusted them to suit her photographing the students from my position, and me from theirs. She got them to give big smiles, and asked me for my 'bemused look' (which was

easy, as I was bemused by the request: I did not know I had a 'bemused look'). It was while this was happening that my mind drifted to the two cartoons that appear at the top of the page, each of which had amused me so much when it first appeared that I remembered it years later.

This session over, the students went on to their next venue, the anatomy museum guarded by its

huge elephant skeletons that have witnessed more than a century of undergraduates pass between them in search of knowledge, or a quiet place for a nap. A few days later, the young and agile Hedwig joined the same gang to hang upside-down from climbing apparatus, while holding on to *We Need Everybody* boards. I have no idea how many other places this group have found, but they are certainly raising awareness of the campaign! As someone privileged to teach them, I have always been very proud of Edinburgh's medical students (*shhh!!* don't tell them! - it would ruin my frequent and theatrical displays of despair about their general cluelessness and their need to study much harder if they are ever going to graduate as doctors), but I confess that, even after twenty years here, the things they get up to still manage to catch me by surprise.

Wherever you are in the world, please consider leaving your organs to those who can use them when you are gone.

Jamie Davies
Edinburgh
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Links:

- We need everybody site: <http://live.nhsggc.org.uk/about-us/health-news/2016/october/stories/we-need-everybody/>
- We need everybody TV ad: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDZ60BABUwk>

