

## ***Virtual Mentor***

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### **HISTORY OF MEDICINE**

#### **Rembrandt's Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp**

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As an introduction to the Historical Postmortem, Rembrandt's famous portrayal of the *Anatomical Lecture*, painted in 1632, seems metaphorically appropriate. Although four centuries removed from the lecture halls of 21st century medical students, it nonetheless captures the essence of medical understanding. Close observation and physical examination of the corpse are necessary in order to see beyond the obvious appearance of the human body to discover the workings and relationships of underlying organic structures and the pathologies responsible for disease and illness. The corpse, lying dead and silent, must be poked, prodded and dissected for the knowledge and answers it reveals to the living.

A closer look at the portrait reveals a text partially hidden in the shadows at the foot of the dissecting table. Representing perhaps, the assumed knowledge that guides their inquiry, the text and its contents are implicitly challenged by the actual dissection itself. The light draws your eye to the corpse and to the faces of the lecturer and students focusing intently on the partially dissected arm.

In the spirit of the *Anatomical Lecture*, Historical Postmortem will poke and prod the corpus of medical history in order to challenge and inform our assumptions about medicine and attempt to view the facts in a new light. In doing so, we may see how the seemingly "dead hand of history" continues to shape our present and future.

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