ANATOMY OF A TEAM

With each new region of the body, students are assigned to a new team – and patient. They'll work with at least 15 other students over the course of the summer and will get to know all of the cadavers. They'll also get to know each other quite well, and that's part of the course's design.

"I have them work on teams to start building camaraderie," Romrell said. "They need to understand the importance of teamwork as they go through a medical career. I emphasize constantly: Medicine is a team sport."

With each team, they'll do anonymous peer assessments to provide feedback on individual performance and promote the development of professionalism, both in taking constructive criticism and in giving it.

"You really get a feel for people's personalities, because it's a moderately stressful situation and you can kind of see what they're about," said Karram. While laughter helped Karram and his team deal with stress, he said he tempered his humor to avoid appearing disrespectful.

The good news is that nobody is expected to retain every piece of information.

"I'm not trying to teach all the facts of anatomy," Romrell said. "What I'm mainly getting at is: What's the anatomy needed in order to learn and understand and be a good physician?"

Every few weeks the students take a quiz, and exams are scheduled every three weeks. Exams are both written and practical, meaning students are asked to look at a cadaver and identify structures. The written portion is administered in the morning, and the practical exam normally is given later the same day.

During the practical, students are divided into two groups, and each group rotates through the lab. Romrell and teaching assistants place about 60 labels on the cadavers, flagging a particular structure. Each student has 60 seconds to look at and identify the structure before a buzzer sounds, signaling it's time to move to the next station.

Outside of class time, most students spend several evenings a week and parts of their weekend in the lab.