

## Lack of Research Interest among Medical Students: Causes and Consequences

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Madam, through your esteemed journal, I would like to draw the attention of the masses towards a serious matter which is being neglected. Research updates medical students on the latest advances in medicine and science and provides new interpretations of existing facts<sup>1</sup>. Being a medical student, it is unfortunate to see the quality of research declining. Despite a number of increasing publications, medical students see a trade-off between quality and quantity and are unable to maintain a balance between the two. Although, in the past few decades, various studies have been done by medical students which have created an impact in the research arena of medical science, the overall picture in our country indicates that we are only left with limited health research productivity. There is no originality and utility of most researches being conducted. One probable reason is that medical students are lacking the appropriate knowledge and awareness required to ignite the thinking and writing process. They don't know which way to go as good mentors are not available to lead. Moreover, there is a shortage of resources i.e. laboratory, equipments, funds, internet facilities, maintenance of data record, patient follow up, free access to indexed journals, data analyzing software, and professional statisticians for data interpretation to conduct any research. The few government sources of funding are too meagre and unsteady to allow planning of research careers<sup>2</sup>. Phuping A, et al. highlights that academics are usually defined as teaching and virtually no private or public sector institutions offer higher salary, benefits, support or even protected time to conduct research<sup>3</sup>. Additionally as most public sector

academics gain their income primarily from private practice, any time spent on research is a loss of income. Another reason is that students consider it to be a burden as research is a time consuming activity and requires a lot of patience. On the other hand, students who are willing to opt for research are discouraged because they are well aware of the hurdles which might come. Such as selecting a research team is a thought-provoking issue, getting them to work, keeping coordination, lack of guidance etc<sup>4</sup>. In this scenario it becomes almost next to impossible for the medical students to bring their intellectual ideas into research writing. The factors related to the constraint of research conductivity were marked as, skill, resource, and knowledge, which is in line with published literature<sup>4</sup>.

Medical students mostly realize the importance of research once they graduate and are trying to get into residency programmes either abroad or in Pakistan since there is a weightage attached to the number of research publications. In other words, a significant matching criterion of residency programmes is dependent upon the number of publications. Hence, published material in their curriculum vitae becomes a necessity. Students even with adequate publications and high United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) scores may fail to enter a residency programme, thus indicating the tough competition a student has to face from this part of the world in USA<sup>5</sup>. Some of these students may not have an interest in research, but they are desperate to get into the residency programmes of countries such as USA, so they will publish and work hard only to get into the residency programme.

Once in the residency programme, students may have to start from scratch in research and face

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great difficulty in understanding the research methodology at this stage. Thus role of undergraduate research assistants is important. Encouraging and motivating students interest in research activity can fill up the void of physician scientists and help developing countries to achieve self-reliance in health care and research<sup>6</sup>.

Implementation of the standard research team may inspire educational and research opportunities. The Institutional administrative committee needs to consider multiple strategies to facilitate and promote research. Organizational support and a process that is receptive to change accompanied by the individual acceptability are essential. Mandatory participation in research activity has been shown to improve students knowledge and attitudes towards research<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, in my opinion, research writing should be a mandatory part of our curriculum so that students may not run away from it and medical education and research departments and faculty should encourage the productive and creative ideas of students. We should also arrange inter-universities and inter-collegiate research symposiums and seminars.

Hence, the main problem is not the lack of interest in research but rather the lack of opportunities by the respective universities/colleges at the undergraduate level. This will only change if we de-

mand accountability from health care providers. As the demand for evidence increases, consequently will the systems to produce and use research in health.

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