

## Family Medicine Made Compulsory Subject in MBBS Program: Implications for Health Care in Pakistan and the Region

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### Abstract

Family Medicine is an emerging specialty that offers cost effective, frontline, and comprehensive health care services. It is considered mandatory for the success of any health care delivery system. Pakistan Medical and Dental Council has taken the courageous step, mandating all medical colleges in Pakistan to have department of Family Medicine and an examination paper on Family Medicine in Final year MBBS program. Repercussions of this PMDC directive will have far reaching and favorable impact on health care delivery and services in Pakistan. PMDC has placed Pakistan in the forefront in healthcare reform in the region and now it is up to all stakeholders to enforce PMDC directive in true letter and spirit.

**Keywords:** Family practice, General practice, Family physicians, undergraduate medical education. (ASH & KMDC 20(1):85;2015).

### Introduction

Family Medicine is an emerging specialty around the world. Family Physicians offer a front-line, broad based and holistic approach that makes their function essential for the success and sustainability of any healthcare system. Their functions includes the provision of integrated, accessible healthcare services and are accountable for addressing a large majority of personal healthcare needs, developing a sustained relationship with patients, and practicing in the context of family and community<sup>1-3</sup>. Usefulness of Family Medicine as a specialty has been proven in countries such as United Kingdom, USA, Australia, Saudi Arabia, and it has favorably impacted health care in these countries. Pakistan is a developing country and with limited resources. Pakistan is lagging behind in health related indicators. Effective use of resources in health care is critical to have a favorable impact on health related outcomes. A need exists to study the

challenges and implications of recent notification of Pakistan Medical and Dental Council, mandating all medical colleges in Pakistan to have department of Family Medicine and an examination paper on Family Medicine in Final year MBBS program.

### Methods

An extensive literature search was conducted and discussed with peers within the specialty to look at possible challenges and implications of PMDC, mandating all medical colleges in Pakistan to have department of Family Medicine and an examination paper on Family Medicine in Final year MBBS program.

### Results and Discussion

There is an overwhelming support from Family Physicians for the courageous decision taken by Pakistan Medical and Dental Council, mandating all Medical Colleges in the country to have Family Medicine departments and an examination paper in final year MBBS program<sup>4</sup>. It is a commendable and courageous act that will have far reaching favor-

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able impact on health care and health of population in Pakistan and the region.

Medical colleges in Pakistan will be required to have exposure of Family Medicine at undergraduate level. This will result in training of medical graduates in the principles of holistic first contact care. Once they go out in the communities and practice, they will offer cost-effective comprehensive care to the masses since most of them do not go for postgraduate training at present<sup>5</sup>.

The graduating doctors will now more likely select Family Medicine as their specialty of choice for postgraduate training. This will improve the overall care proved at front line by Family Physicians. It will also lead to more academic progress of the discipline due to presence and development of Family Medicine departments in all Medical Colleges in the country.

The main challenge in the implementation of this PMDC directive will be its enforcement in true letter and spirit. Due to shortage of trained and certified Family Medicine faculty in the country, concrete steps will be required to expedite initiation of Family Medicine postgraduate training programs to overcome this shortage. In the meantime, it will be much more constructive to recruit Family Physicians with experience and train them in teaching methodology, rather than induct faculty from other specialties that may not understand the principles and practice of this emerging specialty. Challenges facing health care in Pakistan are tremendous and implementation of reforms that puts well trained and certified Family Physicians at the frontline will favorably impact health care and reduce health care costs.

## Conclusions

We must commend Pakistan Medical and Dental Council for mandating all medical colleges to establish Family Medicine departments and hold an examination paper in final year MBBS. It will have far reaching favorable impact on health care delivery in the country. The success of this initiative will lie in its successful implementation. We call on all stakeholders to contribute in implementing this initiative in true letter and spirit.

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