

Undergraduate medical research: An 'endangered species'

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Madam, research formed and still forms the backbone of invention and innovation. Indeed these were the parameters that accessed the progress of civilizations past and yet to come. This is the era of 'evidence based medicine' where we are relying on the published literature for treatment of the patient. For most physicians and researchers, the challenge is unanswered questions that pushes them to dig deeper through the help of research.¹

It is true that researchers have been termed an "endangered species". Indeed, the situation in Pakistan is bleak. Majority of the medical undergraduates have no practical experience of basic research since research is not a part of medical curriculum. Most of the trainees hardly read any scientific journals once in six months.² Graduates from top medical schools in Karachi rated the current research status to be inadequate which highlights the intensity of the issue.¹ This is due to limited infrastructure like poor training in research, no grants for publication, lack of incentives and low interest and demand of the clinical physicians. Also, medical faculty is not present as mentors. Second and third year students who opt for researches do not know the correct way of methodology, analysis and paper writing due to lack of formal training on these subjects.³ Moreover, lack of funding in student knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) studies or any projects, limits the student's interest and time in these. Lack of experienced supervisors, dispute of authorship credit, time commitment and language problems further

adds to the difficulties while conducting a research.

Some individual efforts from isolated institutions is worth mentioning. JPMA's teaching endeavor, the Pakistan Medical Association's Junior Journal Club (PMA-JJC) helps medical students attain formal training in medical research.⁴

The concept of research and its importance is still rising in Pakistan. It was stated by Higher Education Commission of Pakistan that there has been an increment of research papers from Pakistani universities at the undergraduate level.⁵ However, concrete steps need to be taken by universities like providing grants funding all good student projects.³ More workshops and seminars should be conducted by the supervisors of known journals so that students are aware of quality researches that journals demand. Performing research projects at undergraduate level will teach Pakistani students to reason rationally, to demand a better understanding of disease and to frequently question rather than accept blindly. These are indeed the characteristics that will make our scientists stand out in the nations.

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