

Balancing the equation: Medical students and health research

The importance of health research in medicine cannot be overemphasized. It forms a crucial and core component of medicine because of its potential for advancement of scientific knowledge, subsequent improvement in existing practices and engendering critical thinking amongst those who undertake research.¹ While clinical research is being conducted in Pakistan on various fronts, laboratory based research is not as common; lack of adequate research facilities, personnel and funding resources may be cited as important reasons for this discrepancy.

Medical students can assist further research. Their enthusiasm can help carry projects forward under the vision of a qualified supervisor while providing an apt opportunity for the students to make a useful contribution to scientific literature. Medical student's undertaking of research helps in building their professional repertoire, capacity for critical reasoning and medical competency.² Participation of students in research at undergraduate level is associated with undertaking of research at postgraduate level as well.¹ In a questionnaire based study, 93% of 524 students opined that medical research should be conducted to improve their medical training.³ The introduction of Problem Based Learning (PBL) can help inculcate healthier research initiatives as was seen in a survey at our institution where a higher proportion of PBL students had participated in research activities as compared to students in the conventional lecture based system.⁴

Studies done to assess the knowledge, attitudes and practices of medical students towards health research in Pakistan have shown only a moderate knowledge and attitude towards health research.¹ In order to aggrandize

the situation, ample opportunities for research should be made available for medical students in Pakistan. Problems faced by students in undertaking research should be sought and addressed; this can help reduce the incidence of students "dropping out" of research projects without seeing them to completion. Workshops on research methodology and journal clubs should be conducted regularly. In addition to JPMA, other medical journals in Pakistan should also institute a "student's corner" to promote research culture among the medical students.⁵ In addition, it is important to educate students about the nuts and bolts of research ethics before they venture into the domain of the medical research. As the world is ushering in an era of technological advancement, we must move in sync and take steps to instill technological savvy among medical students by developing their internet research skills.⁶

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