

## **Medical students and medical research in Pakistan**

Madam, South Asia contributes to only 1.2% of research articles despite being one-fifth of the world's population. The situation is worse, particularly in Pakistan where there is a notable lack of physician-scientists.<sup>1</sup> One of the main culprits could be lack of research training from the initial years of medical schooling. Furthermore, it has been shown that medical students involved in research were more likely to be interested in academic career and continue research activities later in their lives.<sup>2</sup> This strategy of involving medical students in research has been proposed as a solution to declining numbers of "physician-investigators."<sup>2</sup>

Inadequate supervision, dispute of authorship credit, lack of funding, time commitment, language problems and low salary in research-based careers, are some of the important factors behind lack of research interest among

activity as it gives students a way out from their text books, lets them explore literature and do either field or laboratory work. Apart from that, students have also been beneficiaries of research; it is their moral obligation to return something back to the scientific community. Many research programmes in Pakistan and abroad offer students stipends which can help them financially.

Research as a personal development of a medical student is also critical. Through research-based learning, students develop the intellectual skills of critical analysis, team work, time and resource management, improved writing skills, better ability to convey thoughts, improved information technology skills and data handling. Medical students involved in empirical research tend to learn independently, evaluate critically, improvise their communication power and make critical career decisions.<sup>3</sup> Besides, research added to a medical student's credentials, helps in acing scientific competitions, winning awards and honours, securing competitive residencies locally and abroad and winning student bursaries. This is particularly important from medical students' point of view especially

medical students.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the environment in the universities and hospitals is not very research-friendly and students are not motivated enough by the faculty and peers to take part in active research. A local report pointed out that 41% of the students were involved in research in their medical colleges; however their participation was mostly confined to data collection.<sup>4</sup> Both at government and institution level, there is lack of commitment for promoting research, particularly, at medical student level.

We live in the era of Evidence-Based Medicine where treatment is heavily dependent on the medical literature. Research gives students a better understanding of literature and its application in clinical practice. It encourages students to exploit new findings because the more research a student does, the more interested he becomes in his respective field. Research is a healthy

when there is a growing trend of migrating abroad in quest of better training opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

To sum up, Pakistan lags behind in research particularly at the students' level, because of a myriad of reasons. Sincere efforts from institutes and government are needed to encourage positive attitude towards students' participation in research.

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