

WHY RESEARCH?

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There are many people in this country who feel that there is no need for Research. Very broadly they fall into two categories. Firstly, those who believe that all that is worth knowing is already known and, secondly those who say we can get all benefits for research done by advanced countries who are spending so much on research and we cannot even think of matching, so any effort on our part is waste of time; and the money so saved is better spent somewhere else. Any serious student of human affairs knows how little we know about so many things. Mir Taqi Mir aptly put it: The first group of objectors should be left alone in their blissful world. The second group of objectors are those who believe in living on dole. Why make an effort if you can survive on hand me downs. What different does it make if it does not fit us very well or is not suited to our needs. It is free. Almighty has endowed human beings with an enquiring mind and has instructed them to study the ways of nature. As long as this natural curiosity is alive, we will keep on searching and researching for more information and questioning the explanations which do not satisfy us. As long as there is dissatisfaction with existing state of knowledge, with what is believed as the final answer or solution the quest will be on. Research is therefore needed firstly to answer questions of What? How? and Why? about forces and mechanisms of nature and secondly about such mundane things as why there is so much parasitic disease in this country. What can be done? and how to do it? Solutions based on research elsewhere are not totally transferable to our conditions. They are solutions for factors prevailing there. Copying of things is not possible, what is needed is adaptation, but, which part is applicable, and which is not, can only be answered by local research. Otherwise we will keep on making expensive mistakes. Above all, research is required to produce a critical mind. Throughout history physicians have been known to be persons with a scientific and critical mind. The very words hakim and doctor stand for intellectual attainment. Advances in the biomedical field are so rapid and so bewildering at times, that unless one is familiar with research methodology he or she cannot evaluate what is being published. He or she cannot distinguish what is significant and what is insignificant. Without the critical appreciation of a research report one is open to being duped by the persuasive propaganda and the claims and counter claims of new methods of treatment, put forward by rival drug companies. While it would be ideal if all physicians have some knowledge and experience of research, it is absolutely vital that all those who teach medical sciences must be doing research. How can any one teach medicine to others if one cannot properly interpret the recent advances. This critical faculty comes only by doing it yourself. Just as physical exercise is needed for good health, research is needed to develop a healthy critical mind. There are thus two types of research and two types of research workers. The first is the so called basic research or pure research done by persons who have a forceful internal drive which cannot be satisfied by anything else. They do research to seek answers to questions which for the moment have no practical application. The second type is the applied, goal oriented, or targeted research which seeks to find answers to practical problems facing us and finding practical applications for advances made by basic scientists. The first kind of research is usually expensive and there are only a handful of workers in a field who go for it. Such research workers will work in their areas of choice and go the way they want. There is nothing that can be done to produce such persons. The only thing is to recognize and support such individuals. The type of research and the type of research worker that is needed in a developing country like Pakistan is the applied or goal oriented type. What is needed is a cadre of workers who will find scientific solutions to our daily problems and determine how the latest advances in theoretical sciences can be applied for the greatest benefit of all. In away, such research workers are highly trained technicians and for this very reason they are trainable. Sustained, planned efforts can be made to produce more of such research workers to take up task oriented or goal oriented research to

solve national problems. In truth the real purpose of all higher education should be persons with an ability to objectively analyse the situation and find the best solution.