LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Undergraduate Medical Research in India - The Missing Domain
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Respected Madam,

The article on Undergraduate Medical Research - The Essential Domain¹ highlights the importance of undergraduate medical research in India. We appreciate the commendable effort put in by the author to enlighten the famous medical student’s discoveries. In India, Undergraduate medical research is far from satisfactory. This has been proved by a recent study from south India indicating that nearly 70% of undergraduate students are unaware of research though their level of awareness had a range². With the time constraints of the MBBS curriculum, least number of students is interested in research activities. Emphasis on importance should be made to these students as they are the contributors to the medical science in future.

We feel that though STS (short term studentship) by Indian Council of Medical Research and the Department of Science and Technology (DST) KVPY (kshore vaigyanik protsahan yojana) are doing a lot for the cause, they need to be more publicised especially DST’s KVPY programme. In 2010 790(18.3%) students got selected for ICMR – STS, of them 662(83.7%) students were able to submit their report in time and in 2011 out of 802 selected students only 654(81.5%) students submitted their report in time³. Focus should be made on those students who unable to submit their reports.

Other programmes include Indian Academy of Sciences Summer Research Fellowship Programme (SRFP) and TIFR’s VSRP (Visiting Students’ Research Programme) very few students are opting as it requires complete two months to spend on project which is very difficult for medical student ignoring their clinical postings. Actually the best students should cash on this and make their intelligence to benefit the scientific community by interacting and working with scientists of international reputation.

Interest also needs to be inculcated in the minds of students as most of the students consider research as a distraction and waste of time due to heavy burden of MBBS curriculum and with an aim to crack post graduation seat in first attempt and in India, research projects are not considered for when applying for Post graduation⁴.

It is very important in any research to make the presentation of the work and the new finding. The emphasis should be laid to motivate the student to present their work. In India MEDICON organised by INFORMER and regional/zonal medical conferences for ICMR and KVPY recipients organised by Padmasri Dr.Deo of Moving Academy of Medical Sciences encouraging young medicos to show case their work.

Student section in the journals provides a platform for understanding the process of scientific publication. The author has listed the journals which is a matter for appreciation and as well as a point to be noted for increasing the awareness of the research among the students.

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Exposure to the basics of medical research at an earlier stage at the undergraduate level not only improves knowledge and attitude towards the research but also can enhance the skills of the student in searching and critically analysing literature, improves independent thinking and providing proper guidance at a very early stage can fast-track future researchers.

To conclude, including short research projects in subject like Preventive and Social Medicine / community medicine as a component of internal assessment, students will be definitely encouraged to do meaningful and productive research apart from learning the basics of biostatistics and every STS scholar should be made to present his/her work as a part of research training.

It is time now to encourage, acknowledge the student research and credit it accordingly.

References


