Inculcating Fundamental Research Skills in Undergraduate Medical Students-Pivotal Role of Department of Community Medicine

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Research has a fundamental role in medical profession. It is a routine practice globally nowadays to inculcate the practices of research through the curriculum of medical education among the healthcare professionals. Research incorporation plays a key role in designing, maintenance and upgradation of any curriculum. Medical graduates are expected to demonstrate constructive criticism, a spirit of enquiry, creativity and a research oriented attitude. It has been shown that medical students involved in research are more likely to be interested in academic career and continue research activities later in their lives.

Involvement in research helps students to develop personality skills, such as communication skills, thinking out of box and time management; thereby helping them to become independent learners and critical evaluators. Keeping in view the need of hour, research projects were started for the medical students of 4th year MBBS class as a part of medical curriculum since year 2005 as per mandatory requirement of University of Health sciences, Lahore, for the graduation degree.

There are about 250-300 students in a class, divided into small batches of about 20-25 students to accomplish research projects. The research saga ensues on the first day of arrival of students for their rotational tenure. The proceedings start with research introduction and orientation by the batch in charge. The batch in charge delivers a detailed demonstration of about four hours explaining research protocol, research methodology, identification of the public health problems especially current issues for the development of research topic and questionnaire. Methodology regarding study type and design, sample size, sampling technique, inclusion and exclusion criteria, work plan, ethical consideration, data collection procedure (tool and technique) and study analysis is formulated under the supervision of batch in charge. Finally proper shaping of a presentation is given to the research project for satire, comments and critical review by the faculty members on the day of presentation. Final evaluation is done by Head of Community Medicine Department.

To date, about 141 research projects have been accomplished by the department and 15 have been published in various creditable journals. Main focus is on KAP studies, system researches, qualitative and comparative studies. A cascade of topics having well defined outcomes like prevalence of hepatitis B, Immunization coverage against EPI target diseases or behavioral pattern towards frequent polio vaccination have been focused. Environmental studies comprising of awareness about safe water for drinking, percentage of people using safe and wholesome water, hazards of organic and processed foods and sanitation practices among food handlers have also been conducted. Human populations definitely have occupational diseases and these facts were honored in the form of topics like needle pricks in doctors, diseases prevalent in traffic police and sanitary workers, long working hours of doctors and their effects, the factors affecting academic performance of medical students, their future plans and non-college study hours are all included.

It is worth mentioning that Community Medicine department also conducted system researches like, bed occupancy rate of hospitals, work load on doctors and nurses, client satisfaction in the three tertiary care hospitals, HMIS, patient’s experiences, job satisfaction in doctors and nurses. Most of the patients are females and were covered in the study of utilization of MCH services. Children under 5 years are the future of society. Topics like poor breast feeding, frequency of diarrhea among < 5 years, weaning practices, mothers education in connection with EPI and role of health care providers in educating mothers regarding newborn care. These are the hallmark studies on communicable and non-communicable diseases.

The number of batches were fourteen in all academic sessions except session 2005-06, where number was thirteen. The difference in number of student researches (shown in above chart) is due to the fact that during sessions 2005-06 and 2006-07, most of the batches were having equal number of boys and girls. So they were allotted two research topics separately. Later on, batches comprised of mostly girls and only 2-3 boys. One research topic being allotted per batch. Out of these student researches, few are selected for
publishing. Faculty members under the supervision of head of the department, further work on it and modify it according to requirements of concerned journal. The public health is still being a miniature on the canvas of health in a country like ours. The department of community medicine, Rawalpindi Medical College, Rawalpindi, despite having multiple problems is still trying its level best in inculcating the art of research among the budding doctors with the only aim to improve the health of the community. Community health improvement is a continuous ongoing process and the road to improvement never completes.

References