

# Role of Rawalpindi Medical University Students in Perspective of Public Health

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What role do medical students have in global health activities? On one hand, students have much to offer, such as innovative ideas, the latest knowledge and perspective, and inspiring energy. On the other hand, Medical students lack technical credentials and may drain resources from host communities. Here, we need to examine the dynamics, contemporary roles of medical students in global health activities, especially in healthcare delivery services. Therefore students will have to focus on 3 themes that guide engagement:

1. Fostering an enabling policy environment (e.g., toward greater health equity).
2. Understanding and working within the local context and governments' needs.
3. Leading bidirectional partnerships.

We have to study the implications of short-term exposure and long-term engagement programs and find out 4 recommendations on how to better equip students to engage in the next frontier of global health education and future action.<sup>1</sup>

Pakistan for the past 73 years is pushing hard for a well-established public health system. Over the past 7 decades, the focus of medical schools was more towards the clinical fields. The concept of primary and secondary health care provision remained compromised. Community medicine remained dormant and was merely considered as subject to passing the exams. Inculcating the insight of public health and the real essence of its valued worth could not be evolved beyond a few community visits and documentation. The community-oriented, fieldwork, and project-based study needs to be evolved. Over past years the role of a primary and secondary grade teacher in public health also remained meager, which

could be one of the reasons for the slow progression of public health association among students and the community.

“Public health is defined as the science and art of preventive health, prolonging life and promoting health through organized efforts of society”.<sup>2</sup>

The science of public health is to identify public health problems and establish their determinants and intervening accordingly. The art of public health is to devise methods and to deliver services for health care. The medical Profession has to look beyond curing an illness. It has to find ways to prevent illnesses.

“The aim of medicine is to prevent diseases and prolong life; the idea of medicine is to eliminate the need of a physician” William J Mayo (1861-1939).

Proceeding of national education association promoting a healthy lifestyle, conducting research on preventing diseases and detecting, reporting to identify diseases, etc.

The three domains where medical students can play a role

1. Health and social services improvement.
2. Health Prevention
3. Health Improvement and advancing health inequalities

The university can guide the students to work in small groups and involved in project work and gain practical experience. Attachments /visits to individual families, primary care centres, school health clinics, prisons, Darulaman, etc can help in elevating student's enthusiasm and participation in health care delivery. Most of the medical students are going through the phase of immaturity and have limited experience with very minimal career counseling and guidance.

There is a shortage of staff in rural health centers and basic health units; these provide 80% of preventive and 20% curative health services, which decrease the workload of tertiary health care units. Many Northern areas of Pakistan like Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, Federally Administered Tribal Area, Swat, and other conflicted zones in the country also have a severe shortage of medical professionals. According to the projected survey, still, there is a very large number of populations which is covered by a small number of health professionals".<sup>3</sup>

When a student reaches a medical school level he focuses on passing the exams rather than realizing his potential and core value as a public health medical doctor.

In a study conducted at Rawalpindi medical University regarding specialty choices among future doctors of Rawalpindi Medical University in perspective of public health; only 2 students out of 250 desired to proceed public health and this has opted as the second choice if they failed to proceed in clinical fields. The choice of being a medical doctor and the specialty chosen by Medical students as a future career has always remained an area of interest for medical educators and state departments for health manpower planning".<sup>4</sup> "Most of the students while at time of entering in medical college are already clear and decisive about future specialty".<sup>5</sup> But most of them prefer to choose clinical specialty rather than towards preventive and public health field.

The students' need to understand the value of public health, the demand and requirements of the community from them as being health care providers; they have more to be delivered to uplift the quality of human life by creating awareness, health education, and priority towards lifestyle modifications and informed decision.<sup>6</sup> There is a strong need to educate the community for correction of their attitudes and believes on a priority basis. Rawalpindi medical university was the pioneer to establish its student research forum in 2015. Students' conferences are continuously been organized to acknowledge their work. But the researches are even more towards clinical-oriented researches. Twenty years back there was only one society for first aid and blood collection and there has been a huge gap afterward. For the work-related health promotion and education for the general public and for health professionals a platform was required which has now been established and available at RMU. The medical students are honored for being a part of this awareness program.

To begin with the promotion of a culture of preventive fields; community-oriented programs have been started, where students will learn the practical and fieldwork to serve humanity and save lives.

Students need support and leadership to guide them for such activities. Students follow the directions of seniors and seek inspiration from them. To facilitate, encourage, and for their capacity building, RMU carries a huge responsibility to create the difference for generations ahead.

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