

Medical Research- Local Perspective

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Research in any field has primary importance for survival and progress of a nation. As compared to many other developing countries, Pakistan is lagging much behind even in the field of medical research.¹ “Research is creating new knowledge” and it is through this new knowledge that we can identify and find a solution to our health issues with the ultimate goal of improving health of our population.

We are all aware of the fact that academic success depends on research and publication, but traditionally the impetus behind research activities has remained the same for the past few decades; essentially it is either for completing the requirements for a post graduate qualification or for promotion in teaching cadre. A limited number of practicing physicians are sincerely involved in research and the situation is more discouraging in basic sciences. The strong reasons appear to be lack of motivation and scarcity of available funds.

The importance of inculcating research culture at undergraduate level cannot be overemphasized and establishment of new medical colleges in private sector can contribute to a large extent, by promoting research activities amongst medical students. Special incentives and awards can be introduced as a component of co-curricular activity. The faculty can play a pivotal role by providing guidelines and encouragement towards research and short term research proposals approved and monitored by faculty can easily be implemented. As the students get exposed to clinical teaching their interest in research grows. In a study at one of the institutions in Karachi 49% of medical students had journal reading habits due to requirement of institution and 41% had already participated in research work to some extent.² In another study positive attitude towards research was observed amongst post graduate trainees but deficiencies were found in terms of reading and writing literature.³

Before undertaking any research project it is important to go through various guidelines on research methodology and objectives should be clearly defined. Selecting appropriate study type, considering various variables and research questions for appropriate data collection and properly planned analysis are important parameters to be addressed thoroughly for drawing useful inferences. A comprehensive knowledge of epidemiology and biostatistics is essential for a meaningful message in any study. Hands on workshop on medical writing should be conducted in every medical institution on regular basis and analyses have shown that

such short interactive hands on workshops are helpful and beneficial in improving the knowledge and skill of participants.⁴

Only good quality of research can earn respect to a medical journal, peer reviewing of articles has raised the standard of journals to some extent, but still the menace of plagiarism and bogus research is prevalent. It is needless to highlight the low standards of ethics and professional honesty we are practicing and medicine is no exception. Someone has rightly said “If you steal from one author it is plagiarism and if you steal from many it is research” this holds true in our scenario where compulsive research dominates voluntary research. Criteria for authorship and “ghostwriting” are other major issues that need to be addressed. Enlisting a name in authors list with no contribution what so ever is not something unusual. There are guidelines available and many journals have endorsed “Uniform Requirements of International Committee of Medical Journal Editors” (ICMJE) criteria for enlisting authors names. Accordingly an author should have made a substantial contribution to i) study conception and design ii) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content and iii) final approval of the version to be published. Authors must fulfil all three criteria and everyone who meets the criteria should only be listed.⁵ We can just ask a question to ourself whether we meet the above criteria, before inserting our name as an author, Without professional honesty and hard work we cannot improve the quality of medical research but still progress has been made in number and quality of medical journals during the past few years which is indicative of better times ahead

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