



Letter to the Editor AMJ 2012 5, 7

Is research important in medical curriculum?

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Dear Editor,

Research in the early years of medical school not only enables undergraduate students to develop critical appraisal skills, it also helps them in their future career as a postgraduate. Research also orients them towards evidence-based medicine. Some of the medical schools in Western countries have made research an integral component of medical curriculum. There is a growing trend of research during undergraduate medical curriculum in recent years.¹ However, research has not been incorporated into medical curriculum by most medical schools and neither do the regulatory bodies have a policy recommendation on this issue. Kasturba Medical College (KMC), Mangalore is a premier college affiliated to Manipal University and has the distinction of having one of the highest numbers of short-term studentship in research awarded by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) continually for the last couple of years. This college and the Manipal University encourage and support research by medical students by providing training as well as grants from the University. For the last 10 years, the second year (fourth semester) students are made to conduct a research project during their month-long posting in the Community Medicine Department. These students are divided into small groups of five or six and a faculty is allotted to each group as a guide to mentor their research. KMC, Mangalore is one of the first few medical colleges in India to incorporate the same. Besides, there are sessions held from time to time for orienting students in research and scientific writing. Further there is a provision for some financial support available to every student for presenting papers at a conference.

Though these facts point toward an apparently positive attitude in general, is it really so? Evidence shows that mandatory involvement in research leads to positive attitude.^{2,3} So, has the encouragement to undergraduates and the research training provided as their posting in Community Medicine resulted in creating a positive attitude among the

medical students in general in this institution? Do all students or at least a majority really think positively about research and learning research methods? KMC Mangalore admits 250 students annually, whereas only about 125–150 students apply for an ICMR STS, of which about 40–70 students are awarded STS. So, there seem to be a large number of students who are still not convinced about conducting or learning research. This cross-sectional study was conducted among second (fourth semester) and third year (sixth semester) medical students to determine their perception regarding research during the MBBS course. We wanted to know if the students had a positive attitude towards research and also whether they favoured the inclusion of research into the medical curriculum. Following approval by the Institutional Ethics Committee and permission from the Dean for conducting the study, a self-administered validated and pilot-tested questionnaire was used to collect data. After briefing the students about the purpose of the study and obtaining written informed consent, the questionnaire was distributed and collected after 15 minutes. Voluntary participation was encouraged and the students had the option to refuse participation. The collected data was analysed and presented as proportion and percentage.

Table 1: Students' perception about research (N=215)

Statement about research	Affirmative response number (%)
Research is given adequate importance in the MBBS curriculum in India	108 (53.5)
Research is important for medical students	169 (78.6)
Research is important to solve the health problems of community	181 (84.2)
Research should be included in medical curriculum	178 (82.8)
There is adequate time in medical school to pursue research	72 (33.5)

A total of 215 students 87 (40.5%) boys and 128 (59.5%) girls) participated in the survey. One-third of respondents (69, 32.1%) were from the second year while 146 (67.9%) were from the third year. The majority (86.6%) of respondents were Indians, 8 (3.8%) non-resident Indians (NRIs), and 20 (9.5%) were foreigners. While opinion was equally divided about research being given adequate



importance in curriculum, a majority of students felt research was important for medical students and should be incorporated in the curriculum (Table 1). Further, 45 of 190 (23.7%) respondents had attended a conference while 73 of 195 (37.4%) had attended a continuing medical education programme (CME) or a workshop related to research methodology. Among the respondents 38 (17.7%) students had presented a paper at a conference. When asked if they would like to present a paper at a conference, 61 of 136 (44.9%) respondents who answered this question responded in the affirmative.

The students in this study seem keen to not only undertake research projects, but also to present them at conferences. This is definitely a positive attitude. Further studies are required to assess if a structured program integrated in their course could further help in strengthening this inclination towards research. This study being limited to one institution where a research training program is implemented, the results cannot be generalised. However, this study provides a basis for further studies amongst various institutions, both where such programs are ongoing and where they are not. This will generate evidence to support or refute the need for incorporating research in MBBS curriculum.

Sincerely,

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