



Designing a Research Mentorship Program (RMP) to enhance research productivity at Ebne-Sina psychiatric hospital

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EDITORIAL

Please cite this paper as: Mahboobi H, Shahrzad ME, Seddigh SH, Hamed Y, Sharma A, Khorgoei T, Harakalova M. Designing a Research Mentorship Program (RMP) to enhance research productivity at Ebne- Sina psychiatric hospital. AMJ 2010, 1, 2, 180-182. Doi 10.4066/AMJ.2010.192

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"More than just an extra pair of hands to help with the numerous tasks of doing research, an undergraduate student brings an extra pair of keen eyes. They often see the research from a totally new and innovative perspective."

Professor Robert Winglee (Earth & Space Sciences)

Discoveries in neuroendocrinology and psychopharmacology over the last 20 years have led psychiatry to a new horizon. However, several aspects of psychiatric disorders are still unknown and many developments are constantly challenging the understanding of their multifactorial aetiologies and multifaceted treatment (1). Psychiatric clinics should collaborate closely with research centres to support high quality research outcomes. Thus clinicians will be updated on new molecular mechanisms, epidemiology, prognosis and treatment issues which will also enhance their students' educational experience.

Bandarabbas is the capital and the most populous City of Hormozgan Province in Southern Iran. Ebne-Sina hospital is the only psychiatric hospital in Bandarabbas attached to Hormozgan University of Medical Sciences which is a tertiary care medical teaching and research centre. As authors of this paper we feel there is a vast scope for improvement in patient care through changes in this centre's research program, particularly in students' research and propose some strategies to improve the current situation.

Research activity in the Ebne-Sina psychiatric hospital is quite similar to any other university centre. Faculty members devote time to teaching and clinical activities more than research. Those who wish to participate in research may be hampered by insufficient funding, lack of research skills and high workloads. Moreover, as experts in their fields, as those likely to generate the most important research ideas, faculty members are obliged to spend time on research but have insufficient resources to pay for research assistants to help review literature, write research proposal, collect and analyse data or publish papers. (2) Most are limited to a small number of projects, usually those that are of personal interest.

On the other hand, medical students lack experience but are enthusiastic to learn and do research. They have a positive attitude to science and involvement in research. Changes in the students' curriculum on psychiatric wards may foster their participation in research activities (3). Students do not expect to be paid to do research, write proposals, collect data or interview patients



but they are also committed to excellence in their work. However they lack the skills and experience to frame a good research question which needs the support of a mentor.

It is well known that absence of a good mentorship can reduce productivity in research (4). Despite the improvement in the quality of medical students' thesis and overall research activity in recent years in Iran, there is still a scope to find strategies for improvement (5). Some strategies include simplifying the research application process, establishing adequate and efficient infrastructure and providing dedicated research time (6) which should lead to better mentors/mentee relationship and thus improve the scientific productivity of a student's internship.

We suggest creating a so called Research Mentorship Program (RMP) to enhance the qualitative and quantitative level of research in this centre. There is a wide gap in experience between the supervisor and student. However, a group of 5 to 10 experienced medical students previously involved in a research project, who have published at least one article, completed training on a psychiatry ward and demonstrated an interest in research could work at the interface between faculty members and less experienced medical students who have expressed an interest in research. It is important that the activity should be voluntary - we dub this group of enthusiastic students, '*Mentors*'. They can fulfil the mentor's role while faculty member might mentor more experienced students.

According to the current requirements of Hormozgan University of Medical Sciences (HUMS) it is compulsory for medical students to conduct a research project as a part of their thesis. But the research projects are only reported to the University. Few students present their results in national or international congresses or publish their results in medical journals. Our preliminary assessment shows that some of these results have the potential to publish in high quality medical journals. *Mentors* can encourage these students to work on their projects and can help them to publish their results in medical journals. Thus the findings will be more widely disseminated.

Undoubtedly *mentors* have more free time than faculty members to teach basic research methodologies to less experienced medical students, they are better attuned to students' abilities and they are more accessible than faculty members. Faculty members may therefore reflect on research questions. They can design projects and enlist the support of medical students who then gain valuable experience. This will help foster helpful attitudes and broaden student horizons through first-hand experience.

Educational classes for new students who are interested in research in psychiatry should be taught the terminology applied in patients' records as well as how to document a Mental Status Examination (MSE). A relatively brief introductory course may be sufficient to impart the required skills. (7) At the same time, students should be encouraged to cooperate in research activities during their student years. (8) These research programs can significantly change their knowledge and attitude toward research and life-long learning. (9, 10)

Information and updates about the RMP should be available online via the official website of Ebne-Sina hospital. Evaluation of the RMP should be done every 6 months to identify problems early, find their causes and solutions. An internal magazine can be a good source for publishing regular reports of research activities. Medical students can be introduced to the centre's aim and activities through the magazine. Active research groups should be able to access books, journals, internet and other resource easier. These resources are currently available in the hospital and the directors could allocate a specific time for medical student to utilise these resources for research purposes.

Moreover, it is not possible to obtain the information required from patients' records in some cases because of incomplete medical history. Using a standard format for recording history may help to improve the quality of data and improve the speed and accuracy (11). Creating history taking forms and progress notes may help to produce standardised data and reduce the potential for failures to code patient records for research purposes. *Pro forma*



records may have some clinical value insofar as they may prompt comprehensive history taking and record keeping. More complete information and more accurate details help to formulate an accurate diagnosis. Such data may have particular value in retrospective studies using patient records. Eventually, high quality research activities may persuade university directors to approve a psychiatry research centre at this hospital and investment on research.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank to Ebne Sina hospital and HUMS university directors for their help in designing this programme.

PEER REVIEW

Not commissioned. Externally peer reviewed.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.