

Editorial

Cutting Corners: Dilemma of Shortcuts in Research Paradigm

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Massive increase in economic challenges, high inflation, political instability, social unrest, and unemployment in the last few years has enhanced “Brain Drain” in Pakistan. Unfortunately educated, skilled, and competent individuals leave the country to seek favorable and high salaried job opportunities across the world. Top on the list are doctors who leave the country for two reasons: one is post-graduate training and residency and secondly for better career and monetary incentives.¹ One of the basic parameters required to be eligible for jobs in western world e.g., USA, UK etc. is “Research”, as it is believed to enhance problem solving and critical thinking skills of an individual as well as improve the knowledge of scientific methods.¹ Addition of research experience to a profile helps the admissions committees in selection in highly competitive programs. Research experience reveals dedication of individuals in their fields. Preference is given to those who have participated in clinical or laboratory research, have publications to their list and understand research methodology and data analysis.²

To meet this criterion, medical students and fresh graduates look for shortcuts to add research to their portfolio. Challenges of learning academics and clinical skills burden these youngsters along with limited time and finances.³ They seek help from senior colleagues to be added to some ongoing project. Some of them want to learn the steps involved and be a part of the whole process but others have a wish to be added as an author to some publication without substantive contribution to work. This type of gift authorship can distort the credit of the authors and leads to ethical concerns, such as fairness and honesty. Academic and professional organizations discourage such authorship and label these as unethical. To be an author one should have intellectual

contribution to the study design, analysis, interpretation, writing and review of the paper.

Research in science is not additional, it's absolute and without inquisitive minds the field of medicine will stand still. Knowledge of research enables the doctors to evaluate their practice and polishes them to advance their discipline. The ability to question, evaluate and then test and apply different approaches in different scenarios are essential to be a critical thinker and lifelong learner.⁴ The essence of research is lost when shortcuts are sought by the undergraduates or fresh graduates. Except the few who participate in different steps like concept, data collection, analysis and writeup, others are participating in false practices. To tackle this issue, it is crucial to focus on the following inquiry: "What motivates intellectually capable individuals to seek out expedient solutions?" Deficient knowledge and exposure, curriculum overload, internet inexperience, an uncooperative community, difficulty in selecting a topic, and limitation of financial resources along with mentors in the field, all fit to the answer.³ Instead of blaming undergraduate and fresh graduate doctors, a constructive approach is required. Senior health professionals and higher authorities in the government should develop the infrastructure to conduct research. The areas that need to be addressed include significant resources including financial support, equipment, and experienced researchers. Another important pivotal point is developing research culture. Students should be encouraged at undergraduate level to be engaged in research and this can be achieved by arranging mentorship programs, workshops and establishing research centers and promoting collaboration among institutes and universities. Research and publication of scientific papers during undergraduate studies is a basic pillar that all medical students should learn to develop from the beginning of

their careers, beyond the enrichment of their resumes as future physicians. This will develop the substantial skills and competencies that allow them to respond in the most effective way to the needs of global health.⁵ The responsibility lies on senior health professionals, higher authorities e.g., health ministry and ministry of education, Higher education commission, Pakistan Medical and Dental Council etc. to include research as an essential part of the curriculum, promote the environment and encourage a culture of high quality research.

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