

ABSENTEEISM IN MEDICAL COLLEGES IN PAKISTAN – ACT URGENTLY BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE

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The medical field requires a strong commitment to patient care, intense training, and unshakeable dedication. These crucial traits are shaped in large part by medical colleges, the furnaces where future physicians are formed. Discipline, diligence, and regular attendance have historically been the hallmarks of these schools. But in recent years, there has been an alarming rise in Pakistani medical students' absenteeism. This phenomenon, which appears to be a novel and developing problem, calls into question the nation's healthcare system's future and calls for a careful analysis of its root causes, possible outcomes, and potential remedies. This editorial addresses the varied nature of absenteeism in Pakistani medical colleges.

Absenteeism, defined as habitual or intentional absence from classes or clinical rotations, has become a noticeable issue in several medical colleges across Pakistan. While occasional absences due to illness or unavoidable circumstances are understandable, the increasing frequency and duration of unexplained absences suggest a more systemic problem. Several contributing factors appear to be at play.

The apparent inadequacy of conventional teaching techniques is one explanation offered by some students. The typical lecture-based method, often criticized as uninteresting and ineffective, may not appeal to today's tech-savvy generation. Students might believe that self-study, online resources, recorded lectures, and other easily accessible methods will enable them to learn the material more efficiently. The easy access to information on the internet further reinforces this perspective, prompting some individuals to question the necessity of in-person attendance. Additionally, the strong emphasis on rote memorization in some curricula may diminish students' appreciation for attending lectures, especially if they feel capable of learning the information independently.

The tremendous strain and stress of medical school may also be a contributing cause. Students' mental health can be severely impacted by the rigorous curriculum, the pressure to perform well on tests, and the dread of failing.

A coping strategy used by some students to escape the stress and anxiety related to academic achievement is absenteeism. These emotions of tension and anxiety can be made worse by the intensely competitive atmosphere of medical schools, where students are continuously compared and assessed. The problem is made worse by the fact that many institutions do not provide sufficient mental health support services.

There are socioeconomic variables as well. Many medical students come from a variety of backgrounds, and some may have to have part-time jobs to support their families or themselves due to financial issues. Consistent attendance can be difficult to maintain because of these obligations. Additionally, the growing expense of medical school may put students under more financial strain and make them choose to work over going to school. The issue may be exacerbated by certain institutions' ineffective systems for tracking attendance and holding people accountable. Students could be less likely to prioritize attendance if there are unclear penalties for missing class. The habit of skipping classes can become more common if attendance regulations are applied laxly or inconsistently.

Students' perceptions of traditional classroom instruction have changed as a result of the rise of online learning platforms and the availability of study resources. These tools can be useful additions to classroom learning, but they shouldn't be seen as a substitute. Critical components of medical education that cannot be entirely recreated online include the dynamic learning environment of a classroom, the opportunity to participate in conversations with peers and instructors, and the development of clinical skills through practical experience.

Widespread medical college absenteeism has far-reaching effects and could be harmful to Pakistan's healthcare system going forward. First of all, it lowers the standard of medical education. Students who routinely miss clinical rotations and classes lose out on important learning opportunities, including the development of professional ethics, communication skills,

and clinical reasoning abilities. Future physicians may become less competent overall as a result of this. Second, patient care may suffer as a result of absenteeism. Insufficient training and exposure to clinical situations may make doctors less capable of managing complicated medical issues, which could result in incorrect diagnosis and treatment. Serious repercussions for patient outcomes and safety may result from this.

Thirdly, the culture of professionalism and discipline that is fundamental to the medical field is undermined by widespread absenteeism. It gives the impression that participation and attendance are not important, which might erode the devotion and hard work that physicians are supposed to exhibit. Medical college absenteeism is a complicated problem that calls for a multifaceted strategy involving educators, administrators, students, and legislators.

Improving Teaching Methodologies: To meet the needs of today's students, medical schools must implement more dynamic and captivating teaching strategies. Simulations, case-based discussions, problem-based learning, and active learning techniques can all be used to enhance student engagement and make lessons more engaging. **Strengthening Mental Health Support:** Educational institutions ought to put their students' mental health and well-being first by giving them access to peer support groups, stress management courses, and counseling services. Students' stress and anxiety levels can be lowered by fostering a welcoming and inclusive learning atmosphere.

Enhancing Attendance Monitoring and Accountability: It is essential to put in place reliable procedures for tracking attendance and to enforce explicit attendance regulations. Repercussions for unwarranted absences must be explained and applied consistently. **Addressing Socioeconomic Factors:** Medical schools ought to look into measures to help students who are struggling financially, like providing financial aid, scholarships, and flexible study schedules.

Fostering Professionalism and Ethical Values: Including teaching and assessing professionalism and ethics in the medical curriculum can help students develop a feeling of accountability and responsibility. A stronger professionalism culture might result from highlighting the value of attendance and active engagement in the learning process. **Making Effective Use of Technology:** Online materials can be useful additions, but they shouldn't take the place of in-person training. Instead of encouraging

absenteeism, technology should be utilized to improve instruction and learning.

Faculty Development: Teachers can enhance their instruction and embrace more captivating educational strategies by funding faculty development initiatives. Students' learning experiences can be improved by encouraging teachers to use technology and active learning techniques. Pakistani medical college absenteeism is a complicated problem with many underlying causes. The possible effects on the standard of medical education and patient care are evident, even though some students may provide explanations for their absences. A coordinated effort from all parties involved is needed to address this expanding issue. By putting the above suggestions into practice, medical schools may foster a more stimulating and encouraging learning environment, encourage a professional culture, and eventually guarantee that aspiring physicians are suitably educated and equipped to meet the country's healthcare demands. The passion and dedication of Pakistan's medical professionals will determine the country's healthcare system in the future, and encouraging a culture of regular attendance and active involvement in medical education is an essential first step in that direction.

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