

EDITORIAL

WRITING GOOD QUALITY RESEARCH PAPERS - WHERE IS THE PROBLEM

Yesterday, I opened 6 journals belonging to different medical undergraduate and postgraduate institutes of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and read the current issues of all of these. Out of total 76 total articles published in the recent issues of all these journals, only 4 were labelled as Randomized controlled trials (RCTs). The rest of articles were all descriptive research mostly frequency studies. All these 4 RCTs were non-blinded, without proper randomization, statistical analyses and poor representation of data. Then I searched a few international medical journals and checked their impact factors. The impact factor of Lancet was 47.8 (2016), New England Journal of Medicine was 72.4 (2016), and JAMA was 44.05 (2016). I thought, Why we cannot conduct good quality research and high quality research papers in our journals? Why our journals have no impact?

After going through some of the articles, editorials and systematic reviews to find the answers of the above questions, along with personal experiences, some of the reasons for poor research can be divided into system level, institution level and individual level insufficiencies¹.

The regulatory bodies like Pakistan Medical and Dental Counsel (PMDC), Higher Education Commission (HEC), and College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan (CPSP) have not developed and implemented a curriculum of clinical and educational research properly to develop human resource for the country. Although, these bodies are trying in some way or another to develop a research culture but so far have not reached to a standard that can match the western research organizations. The PMDC curriculum for undergraduate students have not explicitly included the topics and learning outcomes of clinical research. The CPSP has included a mandatory dissertation as an effort to train the postgraduate students in research along with a workshop both for students and supervisors, but so far, it has not helped neither the students nor the faculty, supervisors and clinicians to improve their research skills. Higher Education Commission is focusing on improving the quality of our medical journals up to some extent, but has not achieved its target yet.

Institutional factors hindering research culture

include lack of funding, and lack of standard operating procedures for promoting, supporting, and evaluating research activities to say a few. Lack of ethical and technical boards by the relevant institutions again is a factor hindering research. Up till now, there is no medical institution that is providing grants for research in this province. Mostly, grants are either provided by foreign agencies, pharmaceutical industries or arranged by individual efforts. The recent medical reforms act by the provincial government has included steps to promote research in medical institutes, but is still waiting for implementation. Another important factor is lack of facilities and resources. It is considered to be one of the most important factor in the minds of medical community. But even in resource constrained countries, good quality research can be conducted.

Lack of research training in the curriculum, lack of promotion of research culture by the individual institutes and lack of governing and regulatory bodies support are some important factors in hindering research capabilities on part of individual researchers. Most of the teaching faculty of undergraduate and postgraduate medical institutes is not fully capable of designing, conducting, presenting and evaluating clinical and educational research in the country. Similarly, other factors like lack of time and financial constraints on part of individuals are other factors². Lack of appreciation and support by the organizations also impact the research.

Conducting high quality research especially randomized controlled trials in third world countries is mandatory as most of the population resides in this region of the world. To add to it, more than 80% of trials registered in clinical trials, gov are conducted in western countries³. But the end users of the results of these trials are mostly populations residing in 3rd world countries. Time has come that individual efforts, institutional and organizational efforts are needed to improve and implement the curriculum, provide grants, ease the barriers in conducting research, develop proper SOPs, train and support the faculty⁴. Individual efforts on part of the faculty is required to take part in research programs like certificate, masters and doctoral programs. These efforts will go a long way in developing a culture of research at individual, organizational and national level.

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