

Correspondence

Research oriented medical education

Sir

The editorial on research oriented medical education in India¹ is timely as the status of undergraduate research in the country is far from satisfactory.

It is true that DST's KVPY (*Kishore Vaigyanik Protsahan Yojana*) programme and ICMR's STS (*Short Term Studentship*) scheme are doing their bit for the cause, but lack of university support to undergraduate biomedical research, makes these programmes seem like lone crusaders. Being a recipient of the KVPY scholarship, I am aware of the difficulties that an undergraduate student has to face to complete even a short project.

- (i) The number of undergraduate students motivated to take up research as a career, is indeed few. This is perhaps inevitable given that at present the universities award no bonus credits for completed projects or successfully competing for grants or fellowships at national or international level. So, with the time constraints of the MBBS curriculum, students have no motivation to spend time in research activities. Unlike in universities abroad, we do not consider publications or fellowships as add-on to the curriculum vitae for postgraduate admissions. Thus it gets difficult to form peer groups to discuss and learn research methodology. Moreover, funding is also a big issue, since Indian universities cannot fund ad-hoc projects by undergraduates.
- (ii) It is sad to note that undergraduate research is not considered seriously (with some exceptions) in India, unlike other developed countries. This is evidenced by lack of any Indian journal publishing undergraduate research, as is done abroad in *Journal of Young Investigators*, *McGill Journal of Medicine*, *Student BMJ*, *Student Lancet*, etc. Being involved with the later two journals as a peer reviewer, an initiative like Student IJMR was felt long ago. Student IJMR can really fulfill the existing gap in the Indian scenario. However, it is hoped that in Student IJMR, peer reviewers would also be students and hence

undergraduates would be exempted from competing with senior authors for publication. Besides, stringent peer review would improve the quality of research done by these young researchers.

- (iii) Finding an appropriate mentor to guide and motivate the student through his/her entrance into the world of biomedical research is tough as there are no national mentoring programmes or databases.
- (iv) There are no national level conferences or symposia dedicated to students' research, except for Medicon, organized by Indian Forum for Medical Students' Research and JBNSTS (*Jagadish Bose National Science Talent Search*) Senior Scholars' project presentation. Also, undergraduates cannot get support for international travel to the international medical students' congresses. So most of the projects done by the students go unrecognized and the potential is wasted.
- (v) Lastly, I would like to stress the need for providing some time for students to do summer research externships. I was selected for JNCASR's summer research fellowship but could not attend due to my semester schedule. Medical students one eligible for Indian Academy of Sciences' Summer Fellowship programme; TIFR's VSRP (*Visiting Students' Research Programme*); IISER Kolkata's summer programmes or NCBS training programme. But interested and motivated MBBS students cannot attend because of the time constraint.

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Reference

1. Deo MG. Need for research oriented medical education in India. *Indian J Med Res* 2009; 130 : 105-7.