

Need for strengthening the internship training in undergraduate medical education

Sir,

The internship period during the undergraduate medical education is the most critical period intended to incorporate the practical and communication skills among the students bearing in mind the transformation of a medical student to the practicing doctor.¹ In 1960s, duration of the medical education program was increased from 4.5 years to 5.5 years with the addition of an internship year; however the achievement of this amendment has been questioned frequently.²

The degree of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) is to be awarded after four and half years of successful undergraduate training and 1 year of compulsory rotatory internship where each intern is posted in various departments to receive the training. The purpose of the addition of an internship year was to improve community health services by creating the “*Basic Doctor*”, for urban as well as rural areas of our country. It is assumed that at the end of internship training, the intern will be able to diagnose widespread disease conditions clinically, manage all types of emergencies, demonstrate skills in preventive health care services and above all develop leadership qualities to function effectively as a leader of the health team and to communicate effectively with patients and the community.³

Several studies demonstrated that internship training has failed to achieve intended objectives or created a positive impact and there is a need of restructuring the internship training. The most common reasons stated were lack of active involvement in the training by interns, poor supervision and guidance by the faculties and provision of extremely competitive “pre-postgraduate” examinations for admission to the limited number of specialties are given towards the end of the internship. The interns are spending most of their time for the preparation of these examinations rather than focusing on internship training.^{4,5,6} The following are some of the recommendations for structuring and strengthening the internship training.

- 1) A regular faculty meeting should be conducted at each institute offering the internship training to identify the required key competencies, and consensus should be obtained regarding the need to initiate a formal assessment system for enhanced training of the interns.
- 2) Pre-internship Training programs should be organized with active involvement of students with major focus on motivating and creating a positive attitude among them, towards patients and hospital staff, communication skills and problem solving skills in the work situation.
- 3) Student advising unit should be constituted to provide due guidance and direction when they encounter workplace problems during the internship period.
- 4) Emphasis should be given to follow the Code of Conduct by students and it is expected that they should behave consistent with a high degree of professionalism.
- 5) Hospitals as well as a community should be actively utilized to offer training to the interns in the form of formal training or on the job training, wherever appropriate.
- 6) A Postgraduate student or assistant professor should be made mentor of the interns to provide timely guidance.
- 7) To strengthen the process, a structured evaluation system should be constructed and interns should be evaluated by patients, nurses as well as their mentors. Internship period could be evaluated and scores can be taken into consideration for postgraduate entrance examinations.
- 8) Students should be motivated to write internship experiences, give a presentation on their learning and actions. This can also ease departments to assess the outcomes of the internship.

The medical profession is accountable to community services and public spending, so it is subjected to set of laws and inquiry. Adequately reinforcing and assessing internship in medical curriculum will prepare doctors not only who are safe to practice, knowledgeable and competent, but also have the appropriate professional attitude and enthusiasm to deliver the health care service.

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