Medical students should make the most of research opportunities

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We are in a phase when rapid change has taken place in the medical curriculum. At this critical juncture, I feel that medical students need to experience research. The recent inclusion of electives in the medical curriculum of India is a welcome step and I believe more needs to be done. Block 1 in “electives” allows a medical student to work for four weeks in a basic science laboratory or under a researcher in an ongoing research project [1]. This will not only benefit the students professionally but also has an important bearing on the patients and communities they serve.

In a landmark and classic essay, C Wright Mills commented that there was never a time he was not thinking, reflecting, analyzing, and writing—he was always working on an idea [2]. This is the mindset that research can build up. This is the mindset we want in clinical medicine and population health where continuing critical appraisal of new evidence and engagement with new ideas is vital. The intellectually curious mind creates a sense of personal satisfaction. This also creates an eagerness to engage in learning and discovery as a part of a team [3]. It is always teamwork that paves way for research achievements. Research active health care workers appear to provide better care and achieve better patient outcomes. Given the potential benefits, it is pertinent to expose medical undergraduates and early medical graduates to research and research training.

In a medical college, the students and trainees need to be mentored by experienced researchers to get the best results [4]. A combination of astute mentorship and guaranteed time in the medical curriculum will increase the likelihood of research outputs that are of high quality [5]. The doctors are lifelong learners. An early exposure to research methodology, grant processing, and high impact journals under best clinical minds will help in cultivating clinical researchers for the future.

We are living in an era of competition and a resume that includes research productivity and qualifications is and will continue to be productive. I encourage all students to make the most of research opportunities in medical school and beyond not only for personal and professional benefits but also to contribute to health of patients and the Indian community.

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