

## How to improve the quality of Post-graduate medical education?

The universally agreed expected outcome of Postgraduate Medical Education (PME) is that 'a postgraduate trainee doctor will be able to practice independently and safely' after completing his training.

Are we successful in achieving this goal with full satisfaction? The answer to this question is in affirmative if we consider the performance of Pakistani postgraduate doctors working in the country and Middle East. As a rule quality of any product is assessed by the response of consumers. The general public and employing authorities there are satisfied with the work of our doctors. Similarly, in Pakistan as well, people approve their performance. However, a deeper look into the matter reveals that most of these doctors in the Middle East are working as mid-level health care providers, between consultants and residents, with very few employed as full fledged consultants. This condition forces us to re evaluate our Postgraduate Medical Education in total, with the hope that corrective measures will lead to our doctors acquiring more slots of consultants away from their homeland as well. When we carefully analyze the standard of Postgraduate Medical Education in Pakistan on parameters described by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME), we find many variables like process, structure, content, expected outcome, structured training program, already exist in our system.<sup>1</sup> However, when we thoroughly examine our Postgraduate Medical Education, we feel there is still considerable room for improvement at all levels.

The World Federation for Medical Education recommends that there should be a single body in a country responsible for programming Postgraduate Medical Education.<sup>2</sup> On the con-

trary, multiple tracks for Postgraduate Medical Education exist in Pakistan, as various Medical Universities have started their own programs. These programs lack thorough knowledge of basic medical sciences, a transparent accreditation and evaluation process, and a uniform structured training plan. It would be better if these universities focus on directing their academic degrees like Ph.D. and Masters towards post-fellowship research, and the prerequisite for entry into Ph.D. and master programs can be raised to a major diploma in the relevant specialty, instead of simple graduate medical degree. Postgraduate Medical Education should be left totally to the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan (CPSP), which fulfills the global standards for Postgraduate Medical Education as laid out by World Federation for Medical Education.

With College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan shouldering the complete burden of Postgraduate Medical Education in the country, College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan is expected to concentrate on improving the quality of training. A vital step in this direction could be collaboration with the World Federation for Medical Education recognition program, through which World Federation for Medical Education helps accreditation agencies of any country run the accreditation program in a robust and transparent way. It evaluates their accreditation process, post-accreditation monitoring, and decision-making process about programs.<sup>3</sup> A recognition status by World Federation for Medical Education means that the quality of training is meeting the global standards. Subsequently, it will benefit trainees as their training will improve, and they will be recognized globally.

College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan has a structured training program to develop desired competencies in its trainees, but to attain these expected outcomes, this training program needs continuous monitoring, for which at present no effective system exists. Feedback from trainees, trainers, hospital administrators, and other stakeholders can make the program more effective. Renewal and reforms of content and desired competencies is mandatory. Faculties of College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan can take help from associations of relevant specialties in achieving this task. Since nothing learned from a book is worth anything until it is used and verified in life, trainees should be given more chances of applying knowledge in an excellent learning environment.

Besides an accreditation process of global standard, and vigilant monitoring of structured training program, few other things are also of utmost significance. Education about medical ethics and malpractices should always be part and parcel of any program. Communication skills and proficiency in information technology use in Postgraduate Medical Education also demands attention. Acquaintance with medical research and the practice of evidence-based medicine cannot be ignored. And finally, financial issues of trainees also need to be addressed regularly by continuous communication with government authorities. In developed countries they have a system of CME (continued medical education). CME is composed of 'educational activities' that serve to maintain, develop or increase the knowledge, skills performance and relationships that a trainee uses to provide services for patients, the public or the profession.<sup>4</sup>

The collaboration among the appropriate academic groups, professional associations, and health care institutions with leadership from the Association of American Medical College (AAMC) is essential to create the best learning systems for the professional development of our trainees.<sup>5</sup>

In several countries of the world the word continuing professional development (CPD) been

used, it includes educational methods beyond typical educational formats including self-directed and learner centered approaches.<sup>6</sup>

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In a nutshell, Postgraduate Medical Education programs offered by College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan are framed on correct lines, but working on guidelines provided by World Federation for Medical Education in letter and spirit can help bring the training level to globally accepted standards.<sup>8</sup> Although College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan (CPSP) is producing enough competent specialists to meet the country's demand for specialist care, it is high time to focus more on improving the quality of training.<sup>9</sup> Well trained postgraduate doctors will continue to strengthen our healthcare system.

### **Prof Dr Tariq Mehmood Khan**

Ex-Head Department of Surgery  
Abbassi Shaheed Hospital/ Karachi Medical and Dental College  
Ex-Registrar, Secretary, Councilor, Director General International relations and Senior Vice President of College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan.  
Professor of General Surgery,  
Sir Syed Medical College, Karachi.

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