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Letter to the Editor

Postgraduate education in medical pharmacology: A student’s viewpoint

Apropos the editorial on ‘Postgraduate education in medical pharmacology,’ postgraduate education occupies a unique place in the continuum of medical education. It stands on the foundation laid down at the undergraduate level and is the culmination of a process by which a student becomes fully equipped to face the challenges posed by rapidly changing society.

In India, there are 149 MCI-recognized seats in MD pharmacology. Ironically, the annual intake for MD pharmacology in states like Rajasthan and Kerala is nil.[2] This in itself is an indicator of the extent of nonuniformity in medical pharmacology across the country. The scenario in India is a mix of great challenges with few opportunities. This must be corrected without delay. Some possible measures could be:

- To produce an official document highlighting the scope of pharmacology; this could be uploaded on various websites. It would be an important reference document for any aspiring meritorious student.
- To start specialized skill-based distance learning programmes on topics like drug screening, bioethics, good clinical practices, protocol designing, clinical pharmacokinetics, therapeutic drug monitoring, pharmacovigilance, pharmacogenetics, etc., in consultation with expert agencies of distance education like IGNOU. The practical aspects could be taught at an apex institute. In short, the principles of distance learning need to be converged with regular postgraduate education in pharmacology. This would make optimum use of available resources and infrastructure.[3]
- To provide opportunities for postgraduate students to develop additional skills in communication, management, and use of computers; collaboration with institutions like the IIMs and IITs could be sought.
- To encourage inter-college postgraduate activities like quiz competitions for residents of pharmacology and specific ‘postgraduate assembly,’ covering the contemporary topics in pharmacology for examination-going postgraduates.
- To encourage industry–academia collaboration for workshops and research projects; this will provide the residents with much needed employable skills. Public–private partnership in training residents could prove to be very useful in the long run.
- To initiate internship programmes in coordination with reputed corporate hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, and national and international institutions; this should be envisioned as an integral part of the MD curriculum.
- To put in place organized job search systems and placement activities; for example, ‘job fairs’ should be regular events during the annual meet of the Indian Pharmacological Society and/or there could be incorporation of a ‘placement cell’ in the Indian Pharmacological Society.
- Complete web-based solutions providing online learning, job openings, links to various online resources, podcast of experts, and even sharing of conferences and workshops presentations for the benefit of students at large could be integrated in the form of a dynamic website.
- New innovative courses like MD–MBA, MD–PhD, and MS Pharmaceutical Medicine could attract some of the finest talents in health care.

In conclusion, postgraduate education should not be just about where students go to learn and the methods by which they learn but should be about what they learn and how well equipped they are at the end of their course to enter the field and flourish. The national bodies of pharmacologists like the Indian Pharmacological Society and the Association of Physiologists and Pharmacologists of India should come forward to address the potential shortfalls in the training of its postgraduates and help produce a cadre of globally accredited pharmacologists from India.

Collaborations are an ongoing process throughout the world. When Harvard and MIT[4] can come together for drug development, then why not others?

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Varun Gupta
Department of Pharmacology, J.N Medical College, AMU, Aligarh, India. E-mail: varunpgupta@yahoo.com

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