

## GUEST EDITORIAL

### Establishing Departments of Medical Education: A Major Challenge for Medical and Dental Colleges in Pakistan

Gohar Wajid<sup>1</sup>

The past few decades have witnessed numerous trends in transforming medical education including the development of educational frameworks, competency-based education and increased demands for compassion and care from the healthcare providers (Maniate, 2017). Globalization has intensely jolted the process of medical education, leading to a more complex procedure for the development of physicians (Rizwan, Rosson, Tackett, & Hassoun, 2018). There is increasing realization that the complex medical education system be driven by professional educationists with well-established educational infrastructure in medical colleges. This has resulted in escalating trend for the establishment of departments of medical education in the medical and dental colleges to run educational affairs. These departments form essential component of infrastructure to provide effective and high quality educational services in education institutes. The scope of these departments has been well recognized globally (Khalid, 2013).

In Pakistan, exponential increase in the number of medical and dental colleges, especially in the private sector has brought new challenges to policy makers and regulators. Ensuring the quality of medical education in over 150 medical and dental colleges has increased the volume of workload on the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PM&DC) several folds over the past few decades. On one hand, there is increasing competition among medical colleges to deliver high quality education and on the other hand, there is intense pressure on the PM&DC to transform rapidly to meet the challenges of the 21st century educational system. The establishment of departments of medical education in medical and dental colleges and their effective functioning plays a crucial role in ensuring the quality of medical education at the institutional and national levels. Until recently, there was no concept of such departments in Pakistan. The PM&DC took the right step to make the establishment of these departments mandatory in all medical and dental colleges in Pakistan (Khalid, 2013).

Most medical and dental colleges have established these departments, albeit on papers. Most medical colleges are struggling to equip the departments with appropriate staff

and empower them with the role and functions, they are supposed to perform. Mental acceptance and commitment of senior management including deans, play a crucial role in empowering these 'infant DMEs' to take their roots in the existing educational system (Albanese, Dottl, & Nowacek, 2001). Appropriate funding of these departments is absolutely crucial. The management of the college must ensure the provision of funding for the initial years until the department becomes self-supporting (Batool, Raza, & Khan, 2018).

Shortage of qualified and trained medical educationists in the country makes the job even more challenging. (Davis, Karunathilake, & Harden, 2005) suggest a multi professional team from different professional backgrounds, including medical and educational expertise as the basic requirement for running a well-functioning DME. An ideal skill mix of human resources for a DME includes health professionals, organizers, thinkers, innovators and motivators (Davis et al., 2005). In Pakistan, DMEs are likely to start performing better, once PM&DC issues clear guidelines for staff requirements and strictly enforces regulations to employ full time and qualified educationists.

In Pakistan, another major educational challenge is defining the role and responsibilities of DMEs. The department should have an all-embracing function including teaching, research, and service provision and nurturing the carriers of the academic staff. However, the balance of these activities may vary in individual departments. A DME has the capacity to perform a range of functions in an educational institute. These functions may include faculty development, curriculum development and monitoring, a spectrum of teaching and learning activities, assessment related functions, research and development, and quality assurance and accreditation of the institute. The DME may be asked to plan educational activities or even implement the mandated activities as formal legal requirement.

A stronger and well-functioning Department of Medical Education at the PM&DC level is highly recommended to perform educational governance and regulations related functions at the national level. This department has heavy

responsibility to provide technical assistance to the PM&DC leadership, develop a nexus of DMEs in the country and fulfil training needs of DMEs at the institutional level. PM&DC leadership fully recognizes these challenges and the Chairman of PM&DC recently announced in a medical education conference about the establishment of such department at the PM&DC office. It is envisaged that the establishment and strengthening of DMEs in the PM&DC, medical universities and medical colleges will play a pivotal role in raising the quality of medical education in the country.

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1. Visiting Professor Medical Education