

## LETTER TO EDITOR

### Clinical health research in india: is there a way forward?

Sir,

India is considered as a preferred site for conducting global clinical trials taking into consideration its abundant clinical material, available highly skilled English-speaking medical fraternity. India holds its elite position for being the most preferred medical tourist destination in the world. Clinical trials hold importance in strengthening the country's economy as it's expected to generate business worth over US \$ 1.5-2 billion.<sup>[1]</sup> Up to 65% of FDA-regulated trials will be conducted outside the US, making India the most attractive location.<sup>[2,3]</sup> But, is the nation ready to handle this mammoth responsibility? Unfortunately, the country lacks devoted clinical research workers, and adding to its misery is the non-conducive government policies for carrying out health research activities.

Health research holds a pivotal role in improving a nation's health equity and development.<sup>[4]</sup> India faces a shortage of doctors in terms of its huge population.<sup>[5,6]</sup> The existing poor doctor-patient ratio coupled with the burden of educational and administrative tasks keeps clinical research in the backseat. The meager numbers of trained and experienced investigators with the right attitudes and requisite skills highly compromises research quality.<sup>[7]</sup> Dandona *et al.* have out forward the concept of demand, supply, and environment for pushing research in India.<sup>[8]</sup> This may be the way forward. We cannot and should not regard research as the poor cousin of medicine. Mind-sets need to change, and systematic efforts are needed to improve the linkages between all aspects of health research (basic, clinical, and public health). Establishing and encouraging medical schools/institutions to develop and train quality scientists should be regarded as a priority.<sup>[8]</sup> India today has a surprisingly few number of medical scientists. Medical and paramedical colleges should be encouraged to adopt a more hands-on investigative thinking culture in their teaching syllabus, as currently it is so theoretical that it rarely inspires enthusiasm in young professionals towards health research. Demanding higher standards for the research dissertations currently required for post-graduate degrees would also go a long way to encourage better quality public health research.

Most of the Indian academic institutes do not have adequate budget allotment to meet the expenditure for getting a research paper published in foreign journals. Unfortunately, this forces the researchers to submit their research articles to medium to low standard free journals. This is demoralizing to the research workers.<sup>[9]</sup> To sustain a crop of young talented researchers in the country, attractive packages should be provided in the form of appropriate salaries and opportunities for pursuing further education overseas. Young researchers should be trained in scientific paper writing and in translating research activity into policy-making. Funding provided for the research activities should be secure, long-term, and should be obtained from diverse sources like private organizations, non-government organizations (NGO), and the corporate organizations. Funding for a research activity should be considered as a good investment considering its role in the countries development.<sup>[4]</sup>

Researchers of high academic status should be encouraged to promote and plan research activities in the country. Indian researchers and academicians need to identify what is required in strengthening their teaching institutes. There is a need to concentrate available resources on institutions of high academic excellence both at regional and national level.<sup>[4]</sup> These centers will then play a major role in providing India with high-quality research leaders in the future.

Community participation in research activities can be guaranteed if the clinical studies encompass solutions to their existing problems rather than exploiting local Indian population for finding solutions for problems of the western world, also termed as "neo-colonization."<sup>[10-12]</sup> Private sectors (private practitioners, medical social workers, NGO) are willing for actively supporting the countries clinical research program. But, to make this group a useful asset of the nations clinical research, there is need for their formal training, formulating laws catering to the dreaded medico-legal issues, and making facilities available conducive for clinical research.<sup>[7]</sup> Attempts should be made to strengthen and streamline Medical Informatics and Communication to meet the growing demands and needs of the hungry research community. The recent trend towards revitalizing the academic aspects of health care/medicine through evidence and evidence-based medicine is particularly relevant to India. Indian policy makers, administrators, and professionals should initiate positive steps to ensure that the vast research opportunity that the country offers is exploited to its maximum potential rather than its doctors and patients.

It's necessary to have a common developmental framework for sustaining research activity strengthening.<sup>[4]</sup> The Indian government must provide an environment conducive for carrying out clinical research by making available funds and chalking out legislative policies to keep pace with the ever-progressing research field. Assessment of the outcomes in measuring the success of capacity strengthening activities is required to guide us in the future allocation of resources and to foster targeted investments.

More vigorous efforts are needed by the Indian Council of Medical Research to develop research in India by forming broad-based coalitions between health care providers, private sector, NGOs, civil society, national and international agencies for the crucial financial support. An environment of organized, good-quality health research in India would infuse the much-needed originality and application in health research. Evolving such complex frameworks would require building up a critical momentum for this effort through perseverance and wisdom. Theoretical concepts alone would obviously be not enough, and the practical solutions for this effort would have to be developed wisely to ensure quality effect and momentum.

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