

EDITORIAL VIEW

RESEARCH IN MEDICINE

How to promote genuine research culture in medical institutions: the role and responsibilities of the institutional heads

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The term “Global Health” has been widely used in literature over the last decade. In its broader sense, global health is all about tackling health gaps across the world considering different disciplines, regions, socio-economic status and cultural perspectives to find solutions. There are great differences in perceptions across the globe, and what is appropriate in one place might not be in another. Koplan et al define “Global health” as a field of study, research and practice that places a priority on achieving equity in health for all people.¹

Research for health is a global endeavour and a crucial requirement for promoting health for all. To boost the healthcare system in Pakistan, we absolutely need research. It is the key to creating new and better treatments, diagnostic tools, and ways to prevent illness leading to a healthier public and a better quality of life. It's research that gives us the evidence we need to make smart guidelines, improve good clinical practice, and make sure we are using our resources wisely. It has been emphasised worldwide that without a solid base of research, our healthcare policies/guidelines, built on old or incomplete information or data, can lead to wasted resources and unequal care of our people.²

For health care research, Low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) have poorly integrated systems to undertake primary research. The cultural and systemic obstacles, such as insufficient allocation of funds, ethical and regulatory system impediments,

absence of sponsorship, and low institutional support continue to suppress research in countries like Pakistan. However, the leadership within the institution can aid change this by creating an environment that supports actual intellectual inquisitiveness and creative thought towards relevant research for common health care issues in our region.

One of the top priorities for any institution's head should be creating and nurturing a vibrant research

culture. Why? Because a research environment doesn't just boost the institution's academic and professional standing; it also helps develop evidence-based approaches and sharpens decision-making in any health care settings by local data driven practice guidelines and standard of care. Integrating research as a core component within the pertinent curriculum at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level and engaging faculty is a big cultural shift because it requires changing policies that enable provision of adequate research time to faculty members and students instead of treating “research” as an additional burden.

Investing money (even a small amount) makes it more likely that some infrastructure for research put in place successfully. I know that this is very difficult in LMIC to begin with but supporting a small research project from the department or institution fund can attract global groups/national or international granting agency to step in to continue or expand. Based on my personal experience, this strategy was incredibly beneficial in securing grants, fostering a strong research culture within the department, and ensuring a consistent stream of publications. We also need to have strong ethical oversight. To do this, we could establish review boards within institutions. These boards would monitor and manage research investments to ensure they are done ethically.

Mentorship and capacity building are essential components for maintaining a thriving research culture. Institutional leaders should encourage mid-level faculty to expand their scope by engaging in faculty development programs, pursuing interdisciplinary projects, and fostering mentorship networks for researchers. Additionally, they must actively promote research excellence through salary increases, awards, and offering other forms of public acknowledgment.

In the end, the need to disseminate this information is very important. Publishing more articles in index

journals, hosting research-focused departmental meetings, institutional seminars, and using the internet as a teaching tool will increase the institution's influence and practical value.

Medical institutions in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) including Pakistan urgently need to develop a genuine research culture. It is time to take an honest look at where we stand right now in research and realize what we are good at and what's holding us back and how we can overcome it. If we honestly look at our current situation, we can find gaps in our setup like funding, teamwork, training, and support from the institutional heads etc. Once we have clearly identified these barriers, we will be able to create well-structured strategies to effectively address them for fostering genuine research culture in medical institutions of Pakistan.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Author contribution

Professor Gauhar Afshan is the sole author of this paper.

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