

Editorial

TO ENCOURAGE RESEARCH

The two legs on which medical education rests in a Department of Basic Science are teaching and research. Many medical faculties in the country have started recognizing research experience as equivalent to teaching experience. Research forms an essential part of the training for a medical teacher, particularly in the non-clinical departments. The W.H.O. Committee on Professional and Technical Education has stated that any teaching medical institution that fails to encourage research fails in its duty to humanity and will quickly cease to attract or retain professors and medical teachers of adequate calibre. Post-graduate students would cease to apply for admission to it since it would lack reputable supervisors for their research projects. How can any teacher supervise research unless he himself is conversant with the methodology of research and is actively engaged in research projects ?

The creation of the right atmosphere for research in a Post-graduate teaching institute will ultimately depend not only on the correct orientation of the staff but also very much on the administrative set up. Discretion in the use of allocated budget, purchase of equipment, choice of candidates to fill staff vacancies and selection of the right type of post-graduates are all essential steps in the building up of research atmosphere. In most of the states in India in the medical institutions, all these powers are vested with a few administrative authorities who may not really be conversant with the requirement of the individual departments.

In many countries the Head of a Department prepares a quinquennial estimate of anticipated expenditure by way of staff salaries, equipment, chemicals, studentships and maintenance grants for the next five years and this is subjected to a pre-audit by the Finance Department of either The University or Government whichever may be the sanctioning authority. Once the estimate is approved, the sanctioned amount is transferred to the account of the Head of the Department who is permitted to spend it for departmental requirements and to maintain accounts. The accounts may be scrutinised by the Head of the Institution. But there is no post-audit of the equipment, glassware or chemicals as in our institutions, which tends to shift the importance from work to storage.

I have several times had the tragic experience of witnessing academic staff members hurriedly rushing to retrieve broken pieces of glassware while they were blissfully indifferent to the loss of extracts and purified samples of biological material prepared with enormous labour, only because the former had to be produced for condemnation by a competent authority.

The enormous undergraduate teaching load, the unattractive service conditions which make it difficult to get the correct type of staff and the administrative hazards, all tend to discourage research and frustrate the few imaginative aspirants in the field. In spite of this a few climb

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the uphill path and produce some research work. Even if it be not of exemplary quality the least that the authorities can do is to encourage them to attend conference and present their work. The number of papers presented at each conference from each state will if counted be a direct reflection of the proportion of persons getting research or travel grants or deputation assistance from the governing authorities.

It would be worth our while to make a survey of the number of delegates attending each scientific conference and to see how many of them have received financial assistance of any kind and from which sources, and prepare a statement for the enlightenment of all concerned. From the time of inception of the Association of Physiologists and Pharmacologists of India, the association has witnessed a gradual increase in the number of delegates attending the annual conferences. If the association makes such a survey it may help us to delineate the direction in which further moves can be made to encourage research.

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