

Medical Education: How does it flourish as a Scientific Discipline?

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We are living in an era in which “medical education” has widely been recognized as a branch of science, with its own underpinning principles and theories. It is no longer assumed that any physician or scientist would function as a successful teacher simply because they have content expertise in that given area. This notion has led to the proliferation of medical education within the academic societies and medical schools, to the extent that most prestigious universities offer courses in medical education from workshops to fellowship programs and even higher-education degrees. Being a scientific discipline, it follows that the field of medical education needs research to flourish. As has been widely acknowledged in the practice of medicine and other health sciences, teaching and learning activities are also expected to be based on the evidence rather than anecdotal reports and personal opinions. These research activities are targeted to prove (or disprove) the common concepts and practices of the educators. New theories are also evolved and tested through studies of various designs.

While research in medical education needs to be facilitated and promoted, this should by no means be translated into loosening of the quality standards. Methodological rigorousness is required in educational research, as in any other research project. This entails the need for applying justified theoretical models, collecting data carefully, and documenting findings appropriately. However, it should be noted that there are differences between social sciences and biomedical fields in terms of their philosophical viewpoints and therefore methodological approaches to research. Some of the really good publications in medical education have suffered from remarks made by reviewers and editors more accustomed to reports of biomedical researches.

Pursuing the research activity and presenting it for peer review and finally publishing it provides an opportunity for the educational activities to become available and usable for other members of the society. Many publications in the field of medical education report such experiences and lessons learned from them. Many opportunities exist for presentations of the results of the studies including peer reviewed journals, conferences, as well as other media such as MedEdPORTAL. A quick

look at the literature reveals that the number of articles pertaining to medical education is on the rise. These include systematic reviews, original articles and almost any other kind of papers.

As part of the movement towards a better informed decision making in education (also known as Best Evidence Medical Education), findings of the medical education studies need to be translated into daily practice. Hence, in addition to scientifically sound and methodologically rigorous researches, local and cultural differences which affect the generalizability of the findings of the researches reported from other parts of the world, should be considered. This fact necessitates careful attention to the context of the study and external validation may be required. This fact, as well as the rise in the quantity of submitted papers, has led to the emergence of journals or sections in journals, focusing on the medical education research.

In Iran, in tandem with other advances in science, medical education has also been adopted and developed in recent years. More and more emphasis is being placed on the teaching role of the faculty members and recognition is granted to educational scholarship and innovation. An increasing number of medical universities are undergoing major curricular reform; and finally, there has been a tremendous growth in the number of graduate programs in medical education. In response to the increasing demand of publishing manuscripts on the topic of medical education, the editorial board of *Acta Medica Iranica* has decided to maintain and strengthen the journal reputation and widen its scope by adding a new section which aims at publishing research in the field of medical education. From the February issue of the journal onward a slot will be reserved for the manuscript related to the various fields of medical education, including curriculum development, teaching and learning methods, student assessment, program evaluation, etc.

We hope that publication of high quality papers will provide the journal’s readership with further innovation and research in this area and will grant the required information and aspiration.

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