

## **Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) - A need for research in medical schools**

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The term Andragogy was introduced by Malcom Knowles, based on the seven principles of adult learning. These present guidelines to teach learners in an independent way. The main philosophy being to provide an effective learning environment where the learners can express themselves, to take the ownership of their learning and formulate their own learning objectives.<sup>1</sup> Various learning methodologies have been introduced like reflective teaching, problem based learning, and self directed learning. Amongst them, the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) is currently under discussion on a national and international level. Literature is being published on the outcomes of Peer Assisted Learning, comparing it to conventional teaching.<sup>2</sup>

Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) is defined as “the development of knowledge and skill through active help and support among status equals or matched companions”.<sup>3</sup> The senior students act as role models for their juniors, to help them learn independently in a conducive environment. Amongst the other advantages of PAL, the most important is that the attitudinal changes can be developed in the juniors through a positive role model set by the seniors students. Both The seniors and the junior students benefit from PAL. The seniors learn to work in teams and develop on their leadership skills and qualities, while a mutual beneficial educational exchange takes place between the two. There are certain limitations associated with Peer Assisted Learning highlighted in literature by the medical educationists. These include the following:

1. The quality of the teaching is uncontrolled and not standardized.
2. Students have limited exposure to the senior faculty members.
3. Any negative trait in role modeling by the senior students can be passed on to their juniors.

Reforms in medical education in Pakistan took place back in 1996 since the introduction of integrated curriculum and Problem based Learning by leading medical educationist Professor NA Jafarey.<sup>4</sup> PAL is now being practiced, in a formal as well as an informal manner, at various medical schools of Pakistan like Aga Khan Medical College, Ziauddin Medical College, Karachi and Shifa and Rifah International Schools, Islamabad. It is a part of undergraduate and postgraduate education, especially where modular curriculum is followed. It is likened to the training of final year students by house officers or the training of newly inducted PBL facilitators by their senior facilitators or learning through presentations by senior students in journal club and seminars.

Peer Assisted Learning programs open an interesting area for research, that can be carried out to assess the outcome of students in different medical schools of Pakistan where PAL is being practiced.

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