

## EDITORIAL

# WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF ACADEMIC PHYSICAL THERAPY?

Physical Therapy is considered as a dedicated profession for developing the clinicians through undergraduate UG (4 years Bachelors or 5 years Doctor of Physical Therapy), post graduate PG (Master's Program) or up-gradation programs. In majority of the institutions across the country the clinical Physical Therapist (PT) are themselves responsible for facilitating the students during the academics. Therefore, these clinical PT are focused on teaching new techniques and hand-on skills.

Last decade has been more research oriented worldwide and the practitioners are now more focused on evidence based practice, so should the emphasis on conduction of research in nearly all UG and PG programs. Although, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan has focused on different research courses and projects in their guideline curriculum of the UG and PG programs yet institutions are facing uphill challenges in its implementation; the ultimate challenge being development of research taste in the faculty. If the faculty is being asked to conduct research they are reluctant and provide their limitations such as scarcity of time and pre-occupancy with the clinical activities, students or lectures.

Internationally, it has been suggested that the Faculty of Physical therapy should upgrade themselves into all three dimensions that is the academic, research and clinical although academic excellence is at its utmost hierarchy. A question may arise, 'Which of the three domains should be stronger?' A variation in answers would be received depending on the level of program, the institutions and most importantly the Faculty's perspectives, experience and knowledge. A long and critical debate can be conducted on it.

Moreover, it is essential that the faculty members should be engaged in all three triads where a balance is mandatory to be maintained in all three areas and dimensions. Unfortunately, it is the dilemma of most of the institutions that only one dimensional teaching is taking place. The ultimate goal of being the best clinicians is over ruling. An important question should always be considered, "How much clinical practice?" is required in the curriculum in addition to the education. The target of several institutions is to produce competent PT by providing them quality education and focus on the orientation of hands on skills. In Pakistan, mostly Physical therapy departments are incorporated in the teaching hospitals where students in the UG program obtain exposure in clinical setting in their last 2 years of graduation. These students do their rotations in physical therapy Outpatient department, intensive care units and nearly all departments such as neurology, orthopedic and other medical and surgical units.

While randomly surfing on the internet it was noticed, that now the physical therapy community is inculcating in research and evidence based practice in their curriculum but it is difficult to judge whether the actual conduction of research is taking place or not. When designing the curriculums it should always be questioned, 'How much research or clinical practice?'

Innovative approaches for clinical practices can be placed where simultaneously research can be developed. Unfortunately, the financial insufficiency is the biggest reality and a serious limitation. Research is expensive with few opportunities for scholarships, so different programs are either undercutting this part or compromising on its quality. Regrettably, it is even uncertain whether the teaching faculty is involved in original researches and if they are, do they discuss and share those results with their students and are they incorporating it into clinical practice. If not, then the purpose of research remains unfulfilled. Various reasons are behind it, neither the academicians nor the clinicians are aware of the basic protocols of research. Also, they are not confident in interpreting the results as the departments does not have faculty developed for it; if the teaching and clinical staff is segregated there is lack of team work between them that will ultimately increase the distance in achieving the evidence based practice among patients.

Progress of research department determines the development, growth and future of that institution and its faculty so in order to achieve it several institutes are in process of initiating PhD programs for academic excellence and making much needed connection between clinical and academics. Moreover, the last decade has been extremely successful for other health care fields where HEC promoted post graduate research based programs by providing scholarships to MPhil leading to PhD and PhD students. This strategy not only promoted the young academicians to excel in the field of education but also provided them with better opportunities to avail high level jobs. Physical Therapy still is far away to achieve this target and it requires serious commitments from both public and private sector institutions to develop human resource, infrastructure, and funding for promoting research among physical therapists. They need to be made sentient about the essence and significance of research so that these published evidences can be converted into clinical guidelines. Today, with all these limitations and lacking the question arise 'What is the future of Academic Physical Therapy?'

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