

## **Mainstreaming Research in Pediatric Practice**

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**R**esearch is an integral part of economic and social progress of any country. During the inauguration of 106th Indian Science Congress at Jalandhar on January 03, 2019, the Prime minister of India emphasized this point when he added “*Jai Anusandhan*” to former prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri’s popular slogan “*Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan*” and Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s “*Jai Vigyan*” [1]. He added that “a strong research ecosystem must be developed in the state universities and colleges,” and urged the scientists to work towards ‘ease of living’ for the people, citing scope for innovative steps to tackle the country’s problems in time bound manner [2]. He also urged the science, technology and innovation advisory council to formulate an action plan to encourage research and innovation in colleges and universities [2].

India has no dearth of scientific personnel. However, the medical research in country has not been able to keep pace with many developed and emerging countries, especially in the private and non-government sector. There are only a handful of dedicated professionals pursuing full-time medical research. The present level of investment in the country for Research and Development is 0.88% [3], of which only one-fourth is from private sector. Only a miniscule fraction of this amount is spent on medical research, despite health being a priority for any country’s development. To keep up with the pace of development in science and technology, the present scenario calls for better participation from the private sector.

In India, private healthcare sector is a vibrant force controlling about 80% of healthcare market [4]. Repeated healthcare access surveys have shown that a large majority of Indian population access private healthcare services for both inpatient and outpatient needs [5]. Despite catering to a large population and addressing the majority of disease burden, the research component in office practice is almost non-existent. The barriers include lack of training and orientation in research methods, lack of a conducive environment for research, and lack of funding opportunities, besides

attitudinal barriers. Lack of time is an oft-cited reason for not being able to carry out research in office practice, but it is more often an attitudinal problem as most of the medical research output in the country is anyways contributed by faculty members of medical colleges, who are also not full-time researchers. Lack of training in research methods and paper writing is often the primary reason for private practitioners being non-starters, as far as research is concerned. Thesis completion and submission during postgraduate medical college training is often not a good surrogate for learning the tricks of the trade as thesis is more often perceived as a ritual and compulsion rather than a form of teaching-learning process. The environmental constraints are also real; private practitioners have no postgraduate students or residents for helping in research, there are no ethical committees for clearing their projects, and potentially collaborative institutes are difficult to find. Funding agencies are also not willing to fund individual researchers, without the tag of an institute. Thus, often, many brilliant ideas die down, and the practitioner is back to daily routine, leaving him/her with academic dissatisfaction.

So, what is the solution? First and foremost, the interested practitioners should be provided practical training in conducting research and writing papers for scientific journals. *Indian Pediatrics*, the flagship journal of Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP), is already doing efforts in training pediatricians in Research methods and the Art and science of writing a paper through structured hands-on workshops. These efforts need to be augmented through IAP so that such trainings are available to pediatricians in all zones of the country. To overcome the barriers of lack of time and help, group practice is a viable option. To provide a conducive research environment, establishing collaborative networks such as American Academy of Pediatrics’ PROS (Pediatric Research in Office Settings) network will go a long way [6]. In this digital era, such collaborations should not be difficult, and will result in generation of large amount of useful local and regional data related to epidemiology of diseases and

prevalent healthcare practices. For providing expertise and funding to the pediatricians working in private sector, collaboration with funding agencies such as Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) will be important. IAP can establish independent ethical committee to evaluate research proposals from pediatricians with no institutional back-up. IAP can also establish a corpus fund for sponsoring research activities by such pediatricians. Attitudinal barriers are the most difficult to overcome; one strategy could be to reward people who have made a difference. "Where there is a will, there is a way!"

#### REFERENCES

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