

The Imperative Need for Career Counselling Sessions in the Medical and Dental Fields

Sir,

This letter to the editor highlights an essential aspect of medical and dental education: The imperative need for career counselling sessions tailored to the aspirations of students in the medical and dental fields. As the healthcare trajectory continues to evolve, it is increasingly important that medical and dental institutions recognise how important career counselling is in shaping the landscape of aspiring healthcare professionals.

A health professional's career path is multifaceted and demanding, involving a broad spectrum of activities, challenging clinical rotations, and intense academic endeavours. Amid all this confusion, students struggle with a basic dilemma: What should they do after graduation? They frequently remain in a state of confusion about how to successfully manage their professional fate, given the lack of clear guidance.

The studies conducted in Pakistan have unveiled concerning trends regarding the absence of effective career counselling, particularly for female graduates. Without adequate guidance, many female students struggle with uncertainty, leading to higher dropout rates and a mismatch between career aspirations and educational pathways.¹ In Pakistan, female medical students often have two major challenges: Balancing their professions in medicine and dealing with a great deal of role conflict between their deeply ingrained gender roles as mothers and homemakers.² This conflict frequently manifests itself as uncertainty about their future career prospects and dissatisfaction with their chosen area after graduation. In addition to exacerbating academic underperformance, this lack of direction worsens the lack of qualified healthcare professionals in crucial fields. Furthermore, in the absence of adequate support and guidance, female graduates can experience burnout and disappointment and give up their aspirations to work in the medical or dental fields. This results in a loss of knowledge and competence, which makes it difficult for the healthcare system to offer high-quality care to the communities.

A study by Ock *et al.* highlights the importance of a structured career counselling programme catered to the requirements of medical students to encourage insights about personal preferences, comprehension of one's own strengths, and dissemination of crucial information regarding departmental and career paths after training.³ It also suggests developing courses that provide students with thorough information about healthcare and careers. The study by Ahmed *et al.*, on the other hand, supports the early implementation of career orientation programmes during undergraduate years to provide students

with the necessary resources to make well-informed decisions on their future pathways.⁴ By giving students the chance to investigate the other medical and dental specialities and gain an early understanding of their interests, aptitudes, and career goals, these seminars hope to reduce ambiguity and indecision.

Integrating the findings of the above two studies yields a more complex view of the value of career counselling for medical students. It highlights how early intervention through orientation sessions and organised programmes work in tandem to guide the students towards fulfilling potential careers. This method emphasises how crucial it is to attend to the plethora of demands that the medical students have, as they progress through their professional development.

The capacity of career counselling to enable the students to make informed judgements about their future is one of its main advantages. These seminars provide students the knowledge and tools they need to commence their professional careers with clarity and confidence, by giving them access to resources, information, and mentorship.⁵ Career counselling services at the medical and dental schools are undoubtedly valuable, but they are often underappreciated. Due to the lack of time or a sense of humiliation, many students are reluctant to ask for help or are unaware of the services that are available to them. Several policies and initiatives for institutions to enhance career counselling services for the medical and dental students are proposed below:

1. Encourage the implementation of required career counselling sessions at the significant points in the academic programme.
2. Create a variety of mentoring programmes by assigning students to the academic members or working professionals.
3. Provide seminars for students to learn about different career options in dentistry and medicine as the part of the career exploration programme.
4. Provide students the access to a wide range of resources, such as online databases and educational materials.

To support students from diverse backgrounds, it is important to incorporate cultural competency trainings into career counselling programmes. This means providing training to counsellors so that they can effectively understand and address the unique needs and perspectives of the students from different cultural backgrounds. We need to invest in students' personal and professional development as future healthcare professionals to prepare them for the demands of a constantly shifting healthcare environment. Similarly, addressing the challenges faced by female students in Pakistan involves introducing supportive policies to help them balance their medical careers with their roles as mothers and homemakers. This includes offering flexible work arrangements, affordable childcare options, and advancing gender equality through educational campaigns and

advocacy. By implementing these policies and efforts into practice, medical and dental students' career development and professional achievement may be better supported, which will eventually lead to a more diverse, equitable, and resilient healthcare system.

COMPETING INTEREST:

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION:

WQ: Conceptualised the topic, manuscript writing, review, and submission.

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Wajiha Qamar

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Department of Oral Biology, Bacha Khan College of Dentistry, Mardan, Pakistan

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Correspondence to: Dr. Wajiha Qamar, Department of Oral Biology, Bacha Khan College of Dentistry, Mardan, Pakistan
E-mail: wajihaqamar.ob@gmail.com

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