

Exploring Divergent Careers for Doctors

Sir,

I read with interest the article "Thinking Out of the Box: Alternative Career Choices for Young Doctors in Pakistan" published in your esteemed journal.¹ In this article, Rathore *et al.* mentioned the hurdles faced by doctors, while pursuing a career in clinical medicine and suggested other avenues that can be explored. The article was published six years ago, but as of today, its relevance is still the same as the field of clinical medicine is becoming increasingly saturated. According to an estimate, around 15,000 students get enrolled in MBBS in Pakistan each year, significantly outnumbering the available postgraduate training posts.² Moreover, doctors who have completed their postgraduate trainings are unable to find jobs according to their expertise and are forced to work as medical officers. Therefore, it is strongly advised to seek other potential opportunities. In this regard, I would like to discuss further some prospects for young doctors, which they can pursue part-time or full-time both in Pakistan and abroad.

1. Freelance Writing: In recent years, the freelance industry has grown exponentially and medical professionals can avail this platform by writing health-related content for websites and social media, and making presentations, posters, and infographics for organisations. The University of Health Sciences (UHS) has introduced courses and certifications regarding medical editing and writing that help new writers learn and excel. The major advantages of becoming a writer are self-employment, remote working, and flexible working hours.

2. Health-Tech: Health-tech makes use of modern advances to improve healthcare by combining the expertise of medical professionals with innovation in technology, including the latest devices, software, and artificial intelligence (AI). It is an emerging sector that has gained immense popularity over the past decade. As doctors have a deep insight into diseases and healthcare systems, they are essential for advisory roles and providing critical analysis. In addition, they can get direct feedback from patients regarding the usefulness of technological products, thus playing a vital role in bridging the gap between consumer needs and technology supply.³

3. Entrepreneurship in Healthcare: Doctors have the advantage of having vast knowledge of diseases, and diagnostic and management approaches while working within the healthcare system. This enables them to identify lapses at the earliest and intervene before others. According to an estimate, there are currently 376 Health-Tech start-ups in Pakistan among which telehealth platforms and online pharmaceutical stores are immensely popular.⁴ Considering the increasing popularity of physician entrepreneurship among physicians and the benefits it brings back to the system, innovation, and entrepreneurship is being incorporated into medical curricula around the world.⁵ It is

a unique way of helping patients for those who want to work without a lab coat.

4. Physician Scientist: This pathway is particularly for those with curiosity for scientific reasoning. Doctors have to get a post-graduate degree to pursue this clinical and research job, where they interact with patients and assume research roles simultaneously. Although a rarity in Pakistan, physician scientists are an essential element of healthcare systems abroad, forming a crucial link between biomedical research and clinical practice.

5. Social Media Content Creation: This area covers a broad range of possibilities from motivational podcasts to comedic reels to coaching videos. One can choose their work according to their natural inclination, create relevant content, and post it on desirable platforms. Income can be generated through advertisements, promotional posts, sponsorships, and even paid educational videos and online coaching subscriptions.

To conclude, there are various pathways that physicians can opt for, apart from clinical medicine. Our doctors must be made aware of these potential avenues. Medical curricula should be tailored to include innovation and entrepreneurship, health-tech, and biomedical sciences, enabling physicians to pave the path for themselves in these fields.

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The authors declared no competing interest.

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RS: Conception of the idea of the work, manuscript writing, and accountable for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

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AUTHOR'S REPLY

Sir,

These are very relevant comments and good suggestions, for the doctors planning to explore alternative careers. We agree that the need to explore alternative career choices for the physicians is more relevant now than ever due to a variety of reasons mentioned. Social media has opened avenues which were not available a decade ago. There are some amazing success stories of social media success like that of Dr. Ali Abdaal, who graduated as a doctor from Cambridge University, UK in 2018. However, he quickly changed tracks and is now a full-time YouTuber with a channel having 3.8 million subscribers,¹ productivity videos, a newsletter and has earned an estimated 3.5 million USD in 2021.² He has left medicine completely to focus on his social media skills and engagement.

However, we would also like to caution the young physicians to carefully explore their choices, particularly those related to social media content creation, because not everything that glitters is gold and not everyone can be successful in this field. In

addition, one needs a stable source of income to manage household and personal expenses. Simply relying on social media and freelancing might not be able to provide that. For those who want a detailed list of other alternative career choices for physicians, this list might be helpful.³

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