

Career Choices: Recent Trends in Health Professions Education among Doctors

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ABSTRACT

Background: Right career choice along with the opportunities available provides a track that help in execution of professional identity and satisfaction.

Aim: To identify why doctors are preferring health professions education as career over clinical specialty, their satisfaction with this field and future of this field in Pakistan.

Methodology: A qualitative case study on purposefully selected eight doctors was carried out from May 2019 to August 2019. Participants included doctors who were doing or had already done masters in health professions education (MHPE) from the same university. Semi-structured interviews of two males and six female participants were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Results: Thirteen sub-themes grouped under three major themes were identified. The main reason among doctors for preferring Health Professions Education over clinical specialty was its manageability with the family life after marriage. Moreover, the participants were mainly dentists and they told that dental specialties are super saturated by now. Health professions Education is an emergent, interesting and paying field which is lacking in true and focused medical educationists. The charm after getting degree is that one can be appointed directly as an Assistant Professor without experience. Participants were satisfied as this field promotes critical thinking.

Conclusion: Health Professions Education is a manageable field for doctors with married life and after getting degree appointment as an Assistant Professor adds to its charm. It is an emergent field in Pakistan and there is a need of hardworking and devoted medical educationists with strong nerves to overcome challenges in their way to provide right quality and quantity of educational experiences.

Key words: Health profession education; medical education; career choice; trends

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the twentieth century, society was well served by generations of scientifically skilled physicians produced by medical education. However, widespread changes launched along the turn of millennium.^{1,2} This revolution has touched every aspect of medical education and the intensions of doctors towards their career selection.^{2,3} Career choices are influenced by the graduate preferences both before start of medical education program and during their training after graduation.⁴ Specialty is the transition from somewhat undifferentiated, "stem doctor" to the final, fully-differentiated specialist who is almost completely restricted to one specific area of medical work.⁵ In recent years, interest in specialization in Health Professions Education (HPE) has grown based on society trends, increased public expectations, requirement of accrediting bodies and evidence based education^{6,7,8}.

There has been much debates on different issues related to trends and preferences about post graduate specialization.⁹ Gender influence on specialty chosen¹⁰, experiences during training, impact of social milieu of medical institute, teaching program and roll model¹¹, exposure to wide range of medical specialties during undergraduate medical education¹², all have major influence in career selection.

As trends toward post-graduation in HPE is gaining momentum among doctors, there is limited research regarding selection of this field as a career. Hence, it is imperative to find out the reasons of selecting HPE as a career among doctors now a day. The purpose of this study is to find out the reason of choosing HPE as a career, satisfaction from this field and future of this field in Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study was carried out over a period of four months from May 2019 to August 2019 in a university where doctors were doing Masters in Health Professions Education (MHPE) after approval from Ethical Review Committee.

Sampling technique and sampling strategy: Doctors who were doing or had done MHPE and were willing to participate in the study were selected through purposive, homogenous sampling that utilizes intentional selection of individuals and sites to understand the central phenomenon¹³.

Interview guide and data collection: An interview guide (IG) was prepared and later piloted to revised after careful thinking. IG consisted of informed consent form to be filled by the participant, validated interview questions and space for notes from responses of interviewee. Later, semi structured one-on-one interviews of eight doctors were conducted using interview guide to

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get rich descriptions of the data. Data collection and analysis was done simultaneously until saturation was achieved. Both male and female doctors were included, and clinicians were excluded from the study. Participants were informed about the research implication and all interviews were conducted in a safe, secure and comfortable environment. The conversations of all participants were audio recorded and notes were also taken. Later, the audio recorded interviews were then transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis Procedure: Thematic analysis was employed to make relevant in-vivo codes. Codes and associated data were categorized to develop themes. Themes were then refined after thorough discussions among the authors.

RESULTS

Individual Interviewees (n=08) had either completed their health professions master’s degrees or they were student

and shared the common university which was providing HPE (Table-I). Their basic profession was predominantly dentistry.

Table1: Demographics of participants

Basic Qualification	Gender
MBBS	F
MBBS	M
MBBS	F
BDS	F
BDS	F
BDS	M
BDS	F
BDS	F

Analysis of the transcripts identified thirteen sub-themes grouped under three main themes (Table-II). Several reasons for career preference towards health professions education were identified.

Table-II: Recent Trends of Health Professions Education among Doctors

Themes	Sub-themes	Participant’s Quotations
Why Career in Health Professions Education	Respect and money matters	Being doctor is the most respectable profession and when respect and money combine, it becomes a perfect profession. I am getting interview calls with good salary package.
	Emergent and Interesting Field	Since it was an emerging field that’s why I made up my mind though I was not really ready to leave the clinical side
	Lack of true and focused medical educationists	The country lacks true and focused medical educationists solely dedicated to this field.
	Step towards continuing medical education	I wanted to do some post-graduation as a step towards continuing medical education.
	Manageability	Workload and working hours are quite manageable with my personal responsibilities and affairs. My kids were demanding, and I never wanted to compromise their childhood, so I had to leave my busy evening and night duties. I knew pursuing FCPS in a clinical specialty was not an option for me and my decision of choosing the medical education field was based on its manageability. This field has distant learning, so the hours are flexible. It is manageable with job and married life.
	Attraction of direct appointment as an Assistant Professor without experience	These days MHPE had a broad scope and one can be directly appointed as an Assistant Professor.
	Supersaturated dental specialties	When all the field in dental profession got saturated and after doing MCPS, institutes were hiring me as a demonstrator with less salary, I chose medical education.
Satisfaction with the Field	Promotion of critical thinking	It is challenging and promotes critical thinking. It makes my ideas more innovative and have taught me how to think out of the box.
	Clerical work	I feel to have lost the purpose of patient interaction completely that was behind my choosing the medical field in the beginning. I feel that a clerk could do my job. I don’t feel challenged at my workplace. I am hoping it would get better with time InshaAllah.
	Smart salary package	I am highly satisfied because teaching, learning and research are all associated with this field. So along with a smart salary package there are opportunities for acquisition of vast knowledge in field of medical education.
Future of Health Professions Education in Pakistan	Need for devoted and dedicated medical educationists	We also need devoted and dedicated medical educationists who can bring the reforms to improve the standards of future physicians and surgeons. People who want to dedicate their career toward medical education should join and always keep their mind open for learning and change as the concepts of medical education fight many traditional stereotypes of teaching that are prevalent in our country. Challenges are immense and medical educationists need to have a big heart and strong nerves to overcome these challenges. There is a long way to go for medical education in our medical colleges. It is far from being up to date with the latest international trends and best practices. A lot of work needs to be done to bridge this gap and this work requires energetic, enthusiastic and hard-working people.
	Bright future	Future of this field is hopefully bright since the trend in medical colleges is changing from traditional to integrated system. Moreover, the introduction of standards with PMDC registration has given this field a new identity.
	Saturation point	We are approaching a saturation point where no more vacancies will be available in DME in Pakistan. It’s a new field. There is not much saturation and institutes need good educators to streamline their data and curriculum.

Why career in health professions education: Among reasons of choosing HPE as a career over clinical specialty, the participants believed that it is an emergent, interesting and paying field which is lacking in true and focused medical educationists. Moreover, the charm in

choosing this field is that after getting degree one can be directly appointed as an Assistant Professor without any experience. This field is manageable with family life especially a thing of concern for females as it does not

have night duties. The other dental specialties are super saturated by now according to one participant.

Satisfaction with the field: Smart salary packages and promotion of critical thinking made few participants satisfied with this field, though one participant felt that the clerk could do the tasks of this field and she has lost patient interaction which was the purpose behind choosing medical field in the beginning.

Future of health professions education in Pakistan: Since the trend in medical colleges is changing from traditional to integrated system, the future of this field is bright in Pakistan. Apart from this, there is a dire need of devoted and hardworking medical educationists with strong nerves to overcome challenges in their way to attain latest international trends and best practices. Two different perspectives were noted among the participants about saturation in the field. One participant was of viewpoint that the saturation point is near, and no more vacancies will be available in near future. On contrary one participant told that being new field there is not much saturation and institutes yet need good medical educationists to streamline their curriculum.

DISCUSSION

There has been exponential growth of knowledge in medical field from the last few years. This has created a number of challenges in medical education along with need for individuals to specialize in a specific field. Under the theoretical framework based on social cognitive career theory which is an extension of social cognitive theory of Bandura, we understand career related interest and persistence in job satisfaction. Individuals develop interest and perform better with their strong self-efficacy, environmental support, along with the professional career of their own choice and interest.¹⁴

In this study we explored the reasons behind emerging trends of choosing HPE as professional career among doctors. We believed that maximum information could be extracted from purposefully selected participants who had recently done master's degree in HPE or were doing the coursework. A range of reasons for preferring this field over clinical specialty were identified. Among them, steps towards continuing medical education, interesting, emergent unsaturated field, lack of true and focused medical educationist solely dedicated to this field, attraction of new field and early job opportunities, manageability, super saturated dental specialties, promotion of critical thinking, smart salary package and bright future were identified.

The current study assessed the interest of doctors towards post-graduation in medical education. Majority of the participants perceived this field as way of continuing medical education along with strong self-efficacy to achieve educational task, having opportunities to bring a change in their behavior with increased involvement in various educational scholarship activities. The participants pointed out that this newly emergent and interesting field in Pakistan promotes critical thinking skills. Saturation in this field is less as compared to other specialties and it is providing opportunities for personal and professional growth. Moreover, quick promotion to an Assistant

Professor along with smart salary package is satisfying for them. Post-graduation is an important aspect of doctor's career path and one of the influencing factors in choice of specialty is income with other future career prospects.¹⁵

Although there are lots of research on career choices and the factors that influence in career selection. Most of the studies focused on the intensions and interest of under graduates and graduates related to their specific fields of medicine, surgery, gynecology, obstetrics and pediatrics^{16,17,18,19}. There is limited research on post-graduation in HPE as career specialty.

In recent years, as per society trends, increased public expectations, need for trained doctors and economic constrains in health care, significant changes in curricular and organizational system are taking place in medical institutions. Growing trends towards the professionalism of medical education and accreditation requirements of regulatory bodies has resulted in evolution of medical education as speciality⁷. Accrediting bodies in Pakistan are also paying full attention towards this issue and are trying to bring change in educational system in Pakistan as per international standards. HPE provides community of practice framework that encourages learner's passion for teaching, develops their interest as educator and provide opportunities for engagement in identity formation and professional development²⁰. Until 1996, there were only 7 master- level programs in HPE worldwide and recently they have been increased to 76 and some of which are in process of development. Purpose of these master level programs are not only to provide conceptual knowledge in depth but also to provide opportunities for application of knowledge and skill needed to serve as a dedicated HPE leader^{21,22}. In Pakistan, there is lack of true and dedicated medical educationist as told by our participants. Most of the doctors are still unfamiliar with the true worth of this degree program. There is a dire need of trained medical educationist in Pakistan to play their vital role in understanding the current challenges towards medical education field so that they may take crucial steps to overcome them.²³ In Pakistan, first medical education department was established in 1979 in College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan (CPSp). The purpose was to support post graduate training and examination system. The first official notice for establishment of Departments of Medical Education (DME) in every undergraduate medical college came from Pakistan Medical and Dental Council was circulated around 2008. Since then, a lot of medical colleges have established DME.²⁴ Unfortunately, most of these are running by a single faculty member, either Assistant Professor or senior professor along with other responsibilities of his/ her parent department. Currently seven well-known universities in Pakistan have started master's degree programs with the aim to prepare future educational leaders, innovators, and scholars needed to train the next generation²⁴.

Since the cultural values in Pakistan restrict females from living a professional life, it is generally presumed that a large number of girls leave their profession and become housewives. The reason behind was tough schedule of day and night duties, social pressure by in laws soon after getting married as they feel difficult to manage both family and profession.²⁵ In our study most of the participants were

females and the reasons behind choosing HPE was the flexibility of working hour and manageability with married life.

Limitation of the study: The data was not collected from the doctors of other universities providing with master's degree in HPE. Moreover, the data could be collected through male and female doctors in equal ratio in order to compare reasons among both genders.

CONCLUSIONS

Health Professions Education is a manageable field for doctors with married life and after getting degree appointment as an Assistant Professor adds to its charm. It is an emergent field in Pakistan and there is a need of hardworking and devoted medical educationists with strong nerves to overcome challenges in their way to provide to right quality and quantity of educational experiences.

Future studies need to be carried out on a larger scale involving more universities providing with master's degree in HPE. More male participants should be included to get to know their reasons of choosing this field of specialization.

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