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Short research communication

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Abstract

Background: Many challenges exist to engaging medical students and postgraduate trainees in research in low and middle-income countries.

Aims: This study aimed to assess the motivation of and opportunities for postgraduate medical specialty trainees to engage in medical research, and the perceived obstacles to undertaking research in Lebanon.

Methods: A questionnaire-based survey of all postgraduate clinical trainees was conducted at Saint Joseph University of Beirut medical school, Lebanon. Logistic regression analysis was used to determine factors associated with engaging in research. Odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) are presented.

Results: Of 290 trainees, 252 (87%) completed the questionnaire; 40.1% were specializing in medicine, 25.8% in surgery and 34.1% in other fields. A total of 122 trainees had participated in

research projects: 85.2% in data collection, 83.6% in writing of abstracts, 69.7% in writing papers for publication, 58.2% in project design and 57.4% in data analysis. Most trainees had produced considerable research output (82.0%), with an average of 2.5 publications. Enhancing their curriculum vitae (OR = 1.90, 95% CI 0.84–4.30) and enjoying research (OR = 2.05, 95% CI 0.94–4.44) were not motivational factors for engaging in research. Trainees were frustrated by the limited research opportunities, citing lack of time as a main factor.

Conclusion: There is a need for additional formal and informal support programmes to encourage postgraduate trainees to engage more in research.

Keywords: biomedical research, medical schools, publications, postgraduate training, Lebanon

Citation: Fayad F; Aitisha Tabesh O; Lotfi T; Haddad F; Nemr E. Engagement of medical specialty trainees in research: experience at a Lebanese medical school. East Mediterr Health J. 2020;26(9):1018-1024. https://doi.org/10.26719/emhj.20.038

Received: 29/05/18; accepted: 08/04/19

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Introduction

An active clinical research culture has clear benefits to health care delivery (1,2). Patients benefit from the development of new therapies and the practice of evidence-based medicine, departments benefit from enhancement of their academic profile and clinicians benefit from career advancement. Involvement of clinicians in medical research as early as possible in their careers, even as medical students, is likely to maximize these benefits (3). Although many countries include research training as a formal part of medical training, this is not universal and there are many challenges to engaging medical student in research (4). Similar arguments apply to postgraduate trainees, who benefit from and contribute to research activity also.

Many barriers to undertaking medical research in developing countries exist, such as lack of funds and facilities, and inadequate training. In addition, little is known about the research needs of trainees in these countries during their specialization, as the opportunities for engaging in research have been less well studied. The aim of this study, therefore, was to assess the motivation of and opportunities for postgraduate specialty trainees to engage in medical research, the perceived obstacles to undertaking research, and the outcomes of their participation in medical research in Lebanon.

Methods

Participants and setting

Saint Joseph University of Beirut is one of the largest Lebanese medical schools, with postgraduate training that spans 4 to 6 years. This training consists of four semesters of general training followed by four to six semesters of medical specialization, and two semesters of general training followed by eight semesters of specialty training for surgical specialties. For paediatrics, anaesthetics, histopathology, radiology and other specialties, trainees start specializing immediately in their chosen field. All 290 postgraduate trainees from all specialties at Saint Joseph University of Beirut were invited to participate in the study during September and October 2015.

Questionnaire

A modified version of a previously developed questionnaire (4) was used (Appendix 1). The questionnaire was in English and consisted of multiple-choice questions with free text comments where applicable. Two questions addressed barriers to involvement in research with answers on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was validated by distribution to 25 trainees at Saint Joseph University of Beirut and modified according to their responses.

Statistical analysis

SPSS, version 22.0 was used for data analysis. To evaluate the relationship between the outcome of interest (involvement in research) and categorical covariates (year and type of specialization, type of hospital, reasons for engaging in research and usefulness of research), we used the chi-squared or Fisher exact tests as appropriate. We used logistic regression analysis to determine the association between the covariates and the outcome. Variables with P-value