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POST GRADUATE EDUCATION

Current Perspectives of Medical Pharmacology Post Graduates in India: Need to Commute the System

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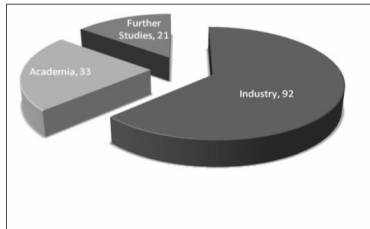
We are aware of a growing need of pharmacologists in academia, in the pharmaceutical industry, Clinical Research Organizations (CROs), Site Management Organizations (SMOs) etc. in India. Also, with the evolving streams like pharmacoepidemiology, pharmacovigilance and pharmacoconomics, a constant need is felt to bring out changes in the postgraduate training programmes in pharmacology, so that the students can acquire suitable skills for a particular job profile.

In an editorial in the Indian Journal of Pharmacology, the author has emphasized the need for students to get expertise on topics like protocol designing, informed consent, bioethics, good clinical practice, design, conduct and monitoring of clinical trials, understanding of pharmacokinetics, reporting of adverse drug reactions, etc. which are very much relevant to the current work in a pharmaceutical company or a CRO [1]. Subsequently, it was also opined that few important initiatives such as 'distance learning programs', management skills, the industry-academia collaboration and 'job fairs', which can be taken up with the assistance of the Indian Pharmacological Society for the overall benefit of the students, should become a frequent endeavour [2].

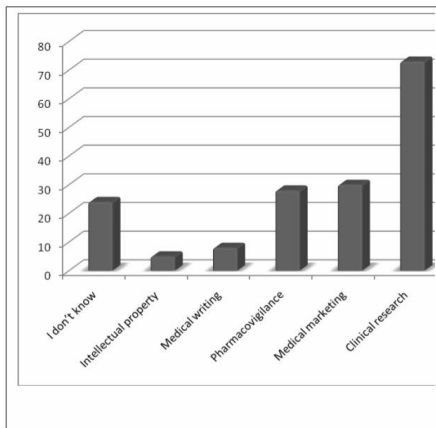
With more lucrative job options being provided by the industry and the amusing mind set of our young pharmacologists towards the corporate sector, we conducted an online survey of the M.D. pharmacology post graduate students of India. It was a self assessment survey where the questions were asked to know their career perspective as pharmacologists and their existing knowledge about the same. The survey consisted of 10 questions and was titled "Our future, our choice". The website www.surveymethods.com was chosen for its good and well accepted services. The web link of the questionnaire was forwarded to the online communities of pharmacologists such as "indpharm", "genxpharm", "young pharmacologists", and "M.D. pharmacologists". Readers who are interested in the full questionnaire can follow the complete link provided in the reference [3]. The survey was taken successfully by 125 M.D. Pharmacology post graduate students and multiple entries could be marked, keeping in mind the confusion prevailing with the students.

Out of all the responses, 92 (73.60%) entries showed their interest in pursuing a career in the industry, whereas 33 (26.4%) and 21 (16.8%) students showed interest in going for academia or further studies respectively [Table/Fig 1]. On being asked about the identification of the top 5 institutes where they would have liked to teach or to pursue their further studies, 68.91% were found to be incapable of doing so. About 65.57% of the students thought that getting a job in a pharmaceutical company was a good career option, but 63 students were not able to identify the top 5 companies where they would have liked to pursue the same. When asked to choose a particular career stream where they would have liked to work in the industry, it was found that 61.86% intended to go for clinical research,

followed by 25.42% who were interested in medical advisory/ marketing and 23.73% in the field of pharmacovigilance. Also, 24 students had completely no clue as to which stream they would like to enroll for, and they marked their choice as “I don’t know” [Table/Fig 2].



(Table/Fig 1) Responses to - Where would you like to pursue your career option after finishing your M.D.?



(Table/Fig 2) Response to - What career stream you would like to join once you enter pharmaceutical industry?

When the same number of post graduates were asked about the knowledge of the job profile and work environment in their stream of choice in the pharmaceutical industry, 80 (67.8%) of them marked “No”, and those who opted for “Yes”, mentioned the main source of their information as ‘peers’ (66.44%), followed by ‘conferences’ (44.19%) and ‘the internet’ (41.86%). Most of the students (111, 94.07%) thought that knowing about Multi National Companies was very important, before venturing for applying for jobs in them and 114 (95.8%) felt the need to get relevant information about the top 5 companies and the job profiles in various upcoming streams in industry.

Our findings reveal that many budding young pharmacologists are confused with respect to the future of their career. A majority felt the need for proper guidance that can help them know the job profile and the required skills in the trade.

With a major proportion of post graduates venturing for jobs in pharmaceutical companies, there is a dire need of institutions who can provide them the knowledge, not only in clinical research (where many options are currently available), but also in other specialized fields of interest like medico marketing / advisory / management and pharmacovigilance. So far, none of the government or private medical colleges has come forward to provide their post graduates with the information on these fields, which is the need of the hour. This can be accomplished very effectively by a module prepared in close association between students, teachers and the alumni who have taken up the jobs in respective areas.

Hopefully, our effort in the form of this correspondence will enlighten, if not many, a few institutions, who will take up the initiative and start new and specialized courses, particularly for medical advisory/ marketing and industrial pharmacovigilance. Interaction with leading M.D. pharmacologists in the industry reveals that a major proportion of the successful M.D. pharmacologists venture into the medico marketing/advisory fields and companies have to spend a lot of time and money to train such candidates. If the skills are known and there are methods to develop them, it will help the pharmacologists enter the job more confidently and will also significantly decrease the break even time (time required to make the employee productive for the company) in which a company expects a new entrant to be *cost-effective*.

References

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