

Introducing General Education in the Medical Sciences: A Call to Action

Sir,

General Education refers to foundational courses within a distribution schema that is a prerequisite for graduation.¹ A substantial body of evidence supports integrating foundational courses such as behavioural, psychological, natural, and social sciences into medical sciences and its training program, leading to better therapeutic alliances and more informed decisions.^{2,3} Despite its importance, Pakistan's undergraduate medical education lags in including core foundational courses. The Pakistan Medical and Dental Council, the former legislative body, had recognised the importance of foundational knowledge in medical teaching.² Introducing foundational courses into undergraduate curricula at university-based schools enables students to gain a deep understanding of global issues, a multi-professional perspective, and a systematic approach to solving health problems.³

Pakistan's Higher Education Commission (HEC) strives to introduce Foundational courses into health sciences to balance the breadth and depth of instruction nationwide. HEC categorises these courses into three key domains: breadth, foundational skills, and civilization knowledge. A total of 39 credits are earned through 13 courses worth three credits each. The breadth domain provides students with a complete understanding of the current dynamics of the natural sciences, social sciences, creative arts, and cultural and historical habitats by completing 18 credits and six courses. In the foundational skills domain, students learn expository writing and quantitative reasoning skills through 15 credits and five courses. The civilization domain provides students with knowledge of pre/post-independence history and religion for two courses and six credits.⁴

Dow University of Health Sciences (DUHS), one of Pakistan's most prominent public sector health universities,⁵ has introduced foundational courses in major health disciplines under the General Education Program (GEP). The Dow Medical College Institute of Health Professionals Education houses the GEP, with 13 faculty members on board and further recruiting. A variety of undergraduate programs at DUHS including Biotechnology, Radiologic Technology, Business Health Management, Nutrition, Physical Therapy, and undergraduate medical education now offer structured HEC foundational courses.

It is still common for medical schools to offer outdated curricula that lack core foundational capabilities and pre-professional requirements.² Only a small portion of the curriculum is often devoted to preparing students with foundational knowledge. We hope that this letter inspires medical educators and planners throughout Pakistan as they update and implement medical education curricula to include foundational courses that help healthcare professionals acquire well-rounded knowledge and skills.

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The authors declared no competing interest.

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