

Medical education: patience pays

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“The life so short, the craft so long to learn.”

–Hippocrates

Medical education is a long fought battle. It takes a lot of time, patience, perseverance, and severe amount of hard work to learn the art of healing the ailing human body. The entry to a medical school is not an easy affair. The length of the course and admission procedures varies in the different parts of the world [1]. No doubt, this intense and protracted training makes them the most highly trained professionals from among people of any profession. The article will briefly discuss the length of medical education in various parts of the world.

Asia

India offers one of the shortest undergraduate programs (Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, MBBS) which spans for 4.5 years followed by a year of compulsory rotatory internship. The baccalaureates can practice as a general practitioner (GP) from here onwards. The next level of training spanning 3 years shall provide them specialized skills in specific specialties such as internal medicine, general surgery, pediatrics, dermatology, etc., providing Doctor of Medicine (MD) or Master of Surgery (MS) degree. One can now opt for a super specialty by investing another 3 years to acquire Directorate of Medicine (DM) or Magister of Chirurgiae (MCh) degrees. Admissions to any of these degrees are through highly competitive entrance examinations. In Pakistan, the duration of MBBS course is 5 years. For specialization, one has to become a fellow of College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan. China offers a 5-year Bachelor Degree followed by a specialization, which usually involves 2-3 years master degree. In Singapore, the 5-year MBBS degree is followed by a year of “housemanship.” Specialist training is accredited by Specialist Accreditation Board. Honk Kong also follows a similar (5+1) pattern for basic medical degree. However, the length of specialization is for 6 years.

Beside allopathic medicine, India also offers bachelor as well as master degrees in other forms of medical sciences such as Unani, Ayurveda and Homeopathic.

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Europe

Medical school in UK is for 4-6 years leading to MBBS degree. This has to be immediately followed by 2 years foundation program. GP specialist training is for 3 years while for other specialties, it can vary between 5 and 8 years. There is still a debate to increase the GP training period further [2]. Medical education in France spreads in three stages. The 2 years of the first stage witnesses a very high failure rate in the exam following the completion of the 1st year. The second stage regarded as master's program stretches for 4 years. The third stage is the residency training period, which can be from 3 to 5 years depending on the specialty. The successful completion of residency earns them an MD degree. German students need to toil for 6 years before they can complete their undergraduate degree and earn the title of Physician. The MD degree is awarded to those who also complete their doctoral thesis. This is followed by a residency in specialization, to become eligible for independent practice.

Several European countries have signed to adopt a unified higher education system in the continent, known as the Bologna process [3]. Medical education has been also made a part of it. The transition to Bologna process is still in its way.

North America

In US, an MD degree is awarded on the successful completion of 4 years of medical school. Another form of medicine called osteopathic medicine is also commonly accepted in the US. The degree rendered by osteopathic schools is Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO). Both an MD and a DO can now go for residency in specialty whose length will depend upon the field of specialization. It can vary from 3 to 7 years or more. Additional training in the form of fellowship (1-3 years) is meant for specialization in a sub specialty. Canada's medical education pattern closely resembles that of US. An initial 4 years of bachelor's degree is followed by 2-7 years of residency in the specialty.

Australia

Australia provides two types of medical degrees, 5-6 years MBBS degree and a 4 years graduate medical degree. Irrespective of the pathway, these graduates need to complete an additional year of clinical internship. The internship is often followed by residency for 1-2 years before formal training into a specialty begins. The postgraduate training

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in the medical specialty is also known as vocational training and takes 3-8 years to complete. New Zealand also follows a similar pattern.

Key to Success

The human body is so complex that we need specialized training to diagnose and treat diseases. Our understanding of the disease processes and our efforts to cure them are constantly undergoing rapid changes. The medical curriculum hence becomes long and demanding. Our patience and labor can even turn this long and tiring journey into a pleasant exploration of this vast ocean of knowledge.

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