

## EDITORIAL

## WHY IS MEDICAL M. PHIL (PAK) BEING DISREGARDED?

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Recently, Vice Chancellors and Principals of medical colleges are appointed in Health Department Punjab and none of them is from Basic medical sciences. None of them is from M Phil degree holders. Medical M. Phil (Pak) is a special degree which is totally different from M. Phil in general education. One very important difference is the duration of years spent to get this degree. A medical doctor spends 24 to 25 years of education and compulsory service to get this degree. While M. Phil in general education subjects can be earned only in 18 years. The second important difference is in the course content of these degrees. To get admission to Medical M. Phil (Pak), prerequisite was two to three years' teaching experience as demonstrator in the relevant basic medical science subject. At that time, the highest merit doctors selected by the Public Service Commission were posted as demonstrators in medical colleges. The Medical M. Phil (Pak), at BMSI, Karachi was a research degree with the same syllabus as was being followed at Indiana University USA at that time. Medical M. Phil (Pak) course included a compulsory Research Orientation Course. M. Phil degree holders supervised FCPS postgraduates in their disciplines. Many M. Phil degree holders were awarded Honorary FCPS. Medical M. Phil (Pak) is not a lower level degree as compared with the FCPS. Instead of disregarding and disrespecting, authorities should acknowledge the services of Medical M. Phil teachers because they served the country during hard times and supported the medical education system of the country for many decades.

**Keywords:** Medical M. Phil, Research Degree, FCPS, Medical education

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Recently, Vice Chancellors and Principals of medical colleges are appointed in Health Department Punjab and none of them is from Basic medical sciences. None of them is from M. Phil degree holders. This is alarming and creates a sense of insecurity and disgrace among M. Phil degree holder medical teachers. Without any scientific calculation and foresight, Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PM & DC) has restricted M. Phil degree holders to become Professors after 2020. So they will never become Principal or Vice Chancellor of a medical institution in future. Unfortunately PM & DC is considering only the duration of Medical M. Phil (Pak) course while completely ignoring the duration of years spent to earn this prestigious degree and its extensive and comprehensive course content. PM & DC is also ignoring the universal fact that basic medical science teachers are far more better researchers as compared with the Clinicians and without research there is no progress in knowledge. Unluckily, the universities awarding Medical M. Phil are not coming forward to defend their granted degrees.

This is very important to note that Medical M. Phil (Pak) is a special degree which is totally different from M. Phil in general education. One very important difference is the duration of years spent to get this degree. A medical doctor spend 24 to 25 years of education and compulsory service to get this degree i.e., 12 years for F.Sc., 5 years in MBBS, one year in house job; two years of rural area service; 2-3 years of experience as demonstrator; two years of M. Phil course. While M. Phil in general education subjects can

be earned only in 18 years, i.e., 16 years to get Masters and two years for M. Phil. The second important difference is in the course content of these degrees. Medical M. Phil degree is a vertically and horizontally integrated medical degree in which three basic medical subjects are learnt and a research thesis with external examiners evaluation and full public defence is essential. The M. Phil in general education is not that much extensive and comprehensive.

There was no post-graduate medical institute in basic medical sciences for M. Phil or PhD, during British regime in areas comprising Pakistan now. Anticipating the need of basic medical science teachers, the National Assembly of Pakistan, in August 1954, authorized the Basic Medical Sciences Institute (BMSI) to undertake meaningful research in clinical and basic medical sciences. The prime purpose of this institution, in addition to treating patients, became training and research in basic medical sciences. The Indiana University (USA) with its staff embarked on the establishment of BMSI. Dr. Paul A. Nicoll, Professor of Physiology headed this Institute.<sup>1</sup> The BMSI with six departments and laboratories, including Anatomy, Biochemistry, Microbiology, Pathology, Pharmacology and Physiology, was thus established as the most updated medical institution of its time. The first class of students was inducted on 1st June, 1959.<sup>2</sup>

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prerequisite was two to three years' teaching experience as demonstrator in the relevant basic medical science subject. At that time, the highest merit doctors selected by the Public Service Commission were posted as demonstrators in medical colleges. Important components of the Medical M. Phil (Pak) course were: i) Research Orientation Course consisting of Biostatistics (that is required for analysis of research results), Animal House (to teach animal keeping and handling for research) and Instrumentation (scientific background of functioning of research equipment). All these components were essential elements to complete any research project. Students who failed this three month's orientation course, were expelled from the M Phil program. ii) Basic Medical Subject 'the Major' in which the M. Phil degree was awarded; iii) Two other basic medical subjects as 'Minor Subjects' and iv) Research and Thesis in area of 'Major Subject' with public defence.

In the meantime, government provided scholarships to many doctors to get PhD from foreign countries. Only a few returned but because of lack of infrastructure, their expertise could not be utilized to produce more PhD teachers and Pakistan had to rely upon indigenous M. Phil teachers for the next four decades. For fifteen long years, BMSI remained the only institute that provided basic medical science teachers to Pakistani medical colleges. After that, on nearly the same pattern, the Postgraduate Medical Institute (PGMI) Lahore was established in 1974.<sup>3</sup> BMSI Karachi and PGMI Lahore provided great teachers of basic medical sciences in the country for many decades. These M. Phil teachers served in Pakistani medical colleges and produced doctors of worldwide repute. Even now majority of basic medical science teachers are M. Phil degree holders and one cannot expect to replace these teachers with PhD teachers for at least a decade to come.

M. Phil teachers were already worried about PM & DC decision of placing M Phil degree at a lower level as compared with FCPS. By dint of their ability and hard work, M Phil degree holders supervised FCPS postgraduates in their disciplines. Many M. Phil degree holders were awarded Honorary FCPS in their disciplines. No vice versa example can be quoted. How then Medical M. Phil is a lower level degree as compared with the FCPS. Throughout the academic world, research qualifications are considered superior as compared with fellowships. The research qualification adds prestige, enhances clinical acumen and

understanding and becomes a perfect combination for entering into medical academic career. The dissertation (as in FCPS) is also a good way in terms of research related report but lack the quality of solid research in view of its scope.<sup>4</sup>

Medical M. Phil was somewhat degraded when, in 2005, University of Health Sciences (UHS) Lahore and other Universities started Medical M Phil on the pattern of M. Phil in general education. They omitted the prerequisite of having two years' experience as demonstrator for admission. They admitted students only on the basis of entry test. They also omitted the Research Orientation Course for M. Phil. So the special nature and importance of Medical M Phil (Pak) was lost and now after passing M. Phil one has to get two years' teaching experience as demonstrator to become eligible for the post of Assistant Professor while previously just after passing Medical M. Phil (Pak), one could be inducted as Assistant Professor directly. No doubt experience of teaching as demonstrator is just like postgraduate training as for clinical FCPS.

This is the need of the hour that instead of disregarding and disrespecting the M. Phil degree and M. Phil teachers, authorities should acknowledge the services of these teachers because they served the country during hard times and supported the medical education system of the country for many decades and possibly will continue to do so for another decade to come because medical universities are producing PhD scholars at a very slow pace. Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan, Pakistan Medical & Dental Council and representatives of associations of basic medical science teachers should sit together to address different issues of categorization of degrees, problems of shortage of teachers in basic medical sciences and to allow M. Phil degree holders to be appointed as Principal and Vice Chancellor to restore the prestige and honour of basic medical science teachers in the country. Making rules without consulting the stake holders only creates unrest and hue and cry which is not beneficial for anyone.

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