

EDITORIAL

OPEN DIFFERENT ROUTES TO GET A PhD —NEED OF THE HOUR

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The only source of knowledge is experience —Albert Einstein

Pakistan is badly in need of PhD teachers in basic medical sciences (BMS). The rate of production of PhD, especially in Physiology in our country is very low. There are many internationally accepted ways to get a PhD, some are suitable for international students. France, a developed European country, started VAE program in 2002 to incentivize productive and effective people in any field through awarding higher degrees, even PhDs, on the basis of their work and experience in the relevant field. To compensate for the acute shortage of faculty in BMS subjects, we should discover some out of the box solution. Higher Education Commission (HEC) and Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) should recognize the internationally accepted degrees in BMS subjects with a lenient policy. Medical Universities should legalize, even if on one-time basis, awarding PhDs to the senior M. Phil Professors. Universities should formulate some criteria, e.g., an M. Phil Professor with 20 years teaching experience and 20 research papers may be granted PhD in his subject. Seats of PGRs may be reserved for students of PhD in different BMS subjects in CIP induction policy in Punjab. Two PGRs may be allocated to each PhD teacher for teaching, training, and guidance in research and thesis writing while the university should conduct examinations and thesis defence of these students.

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Pakistan is badly in need of PhD teachers in basic medical sciences especially in Physiology. The rate of production of PhD Physiology in our country is very low and, at the present pace, we need more than fifty years to have the required number of PhD teachers in our medical colleges. As an example, University of Health Sciences was founded in 2002 and it has produced only three or four PhDs in Physiology. Similar is the situation for other medical universities and for other basic medical science (BMS) subjects. This is a bitter fact that over the years basic medical sciences remained a neglected part of the medical field and because of this, we are now facing a dire deficiency of teachers in these subjects. Current COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the importance of basic medical sciences especially pathology, pathophysiology, immunology, biochemistry etc. This is the time to wake up and open different, internationally accepted, routes to get a PhD, at least in BMS subjects.

There are many internationally accepted ways to get a PhD. Daniel Higginbotham, editor Prospects, states that studying a standard PhD by thesis is not the only means of getting a Doctorate degree. Here are four other ways to achieve this prestigious qualification:¹

Integrated PhD which is also known as the New Route PhD that involves studying a one-year research Master's degree (M. Res) before progressing onto a three-year PhD by thesis.

Professional Doctorate is primarily for current professionals in vocational sectors such as healthcare, teaching and education, and engineering and manufacturing. This type of Doctorate includes a

significant taught component and, therefore, a smaller research project.

PhD by Publication involves submitting previously published work such as books, book chapters and journal articles which together form a coherent body of work and show evidence of an original contribution to a particular field of study.

Distance Learning PhD. If you have family or work commitments, or are an international student, this gives you the chance to undertake a PhD without having to live close to your chosen university. As PhDs are based primarily on independent research rather than time spent in lectures and seminars, distance learning is a viable route for many students.¹

An honorary degree is an academic degree for which a university (or other degree-awarding institution) waives off all of usual requirements, such as matriculation, attendance, course credits, a dissertation or thesis, and the passing of comprehensive examinations. The degree is typically a doctorate or, less commonly, a master's degree, and may be awarded to someone who has no prior connection with the academic institution or no previous post-secondary education.² PhD degrees awarded to political figures and other celebrities is a well-known example of honorary degrees, even known to Pakistanis too.

France, a developed European country, started VAE program in 2002 to incentivize productive and effective people in any field through awarding higher degrees, even PhDs, on the basis of their work and experience in the relevant field. In English, you may call this program as 'Validation of Acquired Experience' which awards a degree to people who have significantly

contributed to their area of work and to the society. As somebody said “Knowledge is theoretical whereas experience is practical. All things being equal, experience is more useful than knowledge since the real world often behaves differently than the textbook.”³ Now-a-days, online life experience degree programs are available at most accredited colleges. Using them can help you earn your distance degree more quickly and at considerably low cost.⁴ BMS teachers are advised to get a PhD through one of these programs.

Societies always appreciate and honour people who are working efficiently in their field and are useful for the society at large. Awarding degrees on the basis of experience and work to productive and useful people is not new to Pakistan. In medical field, Fellow of College of Physicians and Surgeons (FCPS) degrees were awarded to many senior Professors, in clinical as well as BMS subjects, only on the basis of their work and experience and without examination. Internationally, Member of the Royal College of Physicians (MRCP) is the degree earned through passing an examination but Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians (FRCP) and Fellow of the American College of Physicians (FACP-US) are the degrees awarded only on the basis of work and experience. Skill Development Council in Pakistan is also awarding degrees on the basis of work and experience. There are many other examples to quote.

To compensate for the acute shortage of faculty in BMS subjects rapidly, we should discover some out of the box solution. A three step approach in this regard is suggested. As a first step the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) should recognize the

internationally accepted BMS degrees, e.g., PhDs in BMS subjects with a lenient policy. Secondly, our Medical Universities should legalize, even if on one-time basis, awarding PhDs to the senior M. Phil Professors who are willing to train PhD students of the University. For this purpose, Universities should formulate some criteria, e.g., an M. Phil Professor with 20 years teaching experience and 20 research papers may be granted a PhD in his subject. A Diploma Holder teacher, e.g., in Forensic Medicine, Pathology or Community Medicine, with 10 years of experience and 10 research papers may be granted an M.Phil in his subject. In this way, shortage of faculty in BMS subjects will be rapidly overcome, and further the faculty will be available to train prospective M.Phil and PhD students. Thirdly, for example in Punjab, 30 seats of PGRs may be reserved for students of PhD in different BMS subjects in CIP induction policy. Medical Universities may admit these students and out of them two PGRs may be allocated to each PhD teacher at their place of posting for teaching, training, and guidance in research and thesis writing while University should conduct examinations and thesis defence of these students. This will also create an environment of healthy competition.

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