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MEDICO-RESEARCH HUB: A NOVEL PLATFORM FOR FOSTERING RESEARCH COLLABORATION FOR HEALTHCARE STUDENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA.

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Background

It is essential for all healthcare professionals to grasp the fundamentals of research and its processes, even if they are not directly involved in research. The practice of evidence-based medicine necessitates that these professionals make knowledgeable decisions about the optimal treatment for their patients or communities, using the most reliable evidence at hand. To perform this crucial evaluation, they must comprehend how such evidence is generated, which requires an understanding of research principles. The process of learning about research should begin during the undergraduate years of medical education

[1]. Medical research has significantly improved medical practice by equipping doctors with the necessary tools to tackle the most urgent issues in healthcare. Providing cost-effective treatment options and quick diagnostic methods contributes to reducing worldwide health inequalities [2]. Understanding research principles is vital for researchers and medical students to generate dependable, superior-quality articles [3]. Past studies indicate that introducing research at an earlier stage of medical school can enhance medical students' comprehension and performance of medical research. Consequently, numerous medical schools have integrated research into their syllabi [4-

5]. Considering the necessity to develop a curriculum that encourages research, it's crucial to provide research opportunities for undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia to foster a research-oriented environment.

In Saudi Arabia, there's been a rise in the number of undergraduate medical student research. However, only a small number of students have had the opportunity to take a significant role in these research projects to gather enough expertise to perform research independently [5-6]. Colleges where research projects are not a compulsory part of the graduation requirements often witness a low number of graduates with research experience [5-6]. Research carried out at Umm Al-Qura University in Saudi Arabia found that merely 10.8% of students from health colleges possess a sufficient research background. Furthermore, only 6.6% of these students had published a medical research paper [7]. Even though a growing number of medical students are participating in research for diverse reasons [8], research indicates that the quality of students' research projects often falls short, and they don't significantly contribute to the scientific community [9-10].

At present, undertaking a research project is a mandatory requirement for graduation in many medical colleges in Saudi Arabia [11]. Furthermore, the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties (SCFHS), a regulatory body that establishes the criteria for student admission into Saudi residency programs, recently declared that involvement in research activities and publications in acceptable journals would be awarded 6 points out of a total of 20 points available for

residency applications as of 2022 [12]. There has been a rise in the number of research-oriented summer schools aimed at motivating students to acquire practical experience under the guidance of established researchers and physicians. While such initiatives can enhance students' understanding of research principles, numerous international studies have indicated that these changes can often spark controversy. It is because they might inadvertently affect the quality and volume of student's future contributions to the field. The pressure to increase their chances of acceptance into competitive residency programs might lead students to publish more articles, potentially compromising quality [13].

Saudi Medical Journal for Students-MedEdu Tabuk (SMJS-MET)

SMJS-MET are official publications of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Tabuk, which currently include the i. The Saudi Medical Journal for Students (SMJS), the official peer-reviewed student medical journal of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Tabuk (FoM-UT), and ii. MedEdu Tabuk (MET), the official newsletter of FoM-UT, with over 50,000 subscribers .. SMJS is the first Student Medical Journal (SMJ) in the Gulf region. SMJ is a concept gaining renewed interest in medical publications, as undergraduate healthcare students must pursue research and publish their work. Publication in any conventional peer-reviewed journal for undergraduate students is taxing. The idea that a student has to compete with researchers having decades of experience and access to incomparable funds and resources needs to



Figure 1: Logo of the MedicoResearchHub

be addressed. Students should have a welcoming platform to publish their work. SMJs provide this platform by giving priority to students [14].

On the one hand, students who are willing to participate in a specific field of healthcare research often fail to find suitable PIs, and on the other hand, PIs find it challenging to find the appropriate student to include in their projects. Therefore, there is a need to create a database of student researchers so that PIs and Senior researchers can communicate with students willing to participate in their projects.

MedicoResearchHub at SMJS-MET

The MedicoResearchHub of the Saudi Medical Journal for Students-MedEdu Tabuk (MRH, SMJS-MET) [Figure 1] is a global database of undergraduate students willing to participate in Health Care Research. The primary objective of this Hub is to foster communication between students willing to perform healthcare research with researchers. The vision of this initiative is to establish

itself as the foremost reference and preferred platform for students, specialists, and research enthusiasts in medical specializations. The Hub will provide a platform that nurtures students' interest in scientific research, broadens their knowledge, and facilitates the exchange of experiences in this domain. The ultimate aim is to cultivate an environment that encourages learning, research, and innovation in healthcare.

The database in MRH, SMJS-MET will be structured and organized according to students' respective interests in the branch of healthcare specialty that they are interested in. Ergo, it will facilitate the researchers to select students based on their preferences. The database will be accessible from the Saudi Medical Journal of Students (SMJS) web page and will be free of charge.

The MRH of SMJS-MET aspires to be an essential bridge of communication between students interested in healthcare research, faculty, and researchers. The database aims to provide the necessary information to select the most befitting student researcher properly.

The author IAA is an Editor at SMJS-MET, a coordinator of MedicoResearchHub (MRH, SMJS-MET), and a 6th-year student at FoM, UT. The author MTR, a Faculty at FoM-UT, is the founding Editor-in-Chief of SMJS and coordinator of MRH, SMJS-MET. The author AMMA helped in preparing the manuscript.

Conclusion

The MedicoResearchHub project represents a significant step towards fostering a research-oriented culture among medical students in Saudi Arabia. By providing a structured and accessible database for students to find research opportunities in their specific fields of interest, it aims to enhance students' understanding and execution of medical research. However, the project also recognizes the need for continuous evaluation and improvement to ensure it effectively meets its objectives and contributes to the broader goals of scientific advancement and improved healthcare quality in the Kingdom.

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