

**EDITORIAL****Social responsiveness of medical schools: time to address the social accountability of the medical institutions in Pakistan**

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The recent trend in medical education is to promote social accountability and social responsiveness of health professional's institutions to meet the health care needs of the country. The medical colleges are unique training institutes as they not only have to impart training to the medical graduates but also are service providers for the communities. They have a mandate from the society to provide quality service and at the same time impart high quality training to the future health care providers of the society. The medical schools in the developing world are now responding to the needs of the changing time and there is a growing awareness regarding the social accountability of the Colleges dealing with the medical and health sciences training.<sup>1,2</sup> This has become more important with the increasing globalization and the need for international accreditation of medical institutions. This editorial will address the need and responsiveness of medical institutions in Pakistan towards the society.

**Social accountability; what is it?**

Social responsibility, social responsiveness and social accountability are sometimes used synonymously however for an educated reader here are their subtle differences. The terms as defined by Charles Boelen<sup>3,4</sup> are:

- **Social Responsibility** is the awareness of the institution regarding duties towards the society.
- **Social Responsiveness** is the engagement in a course of actions responding to societal needs.
- **Social Accountability** adds a documented justification for the scope of undertaken actions and a verification that anticipated outcomes and results have been attained.

The terms as described by a recent comment by Gibbs<sup>5</sup> are catchy with more lip-service and less of action.

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The focus has not been caught-up by the developing world and less by Pakistan. Boelen C in 1995 proposed a grid to measure the social accountability of health care institutions<sup>6</sup>. The grid evaluates education, research and service provided by the medical institutions relative to the four universal values which are: quality, equity, relevance and cost-effectiveness of health care.<sup>7</sup> I had done a survey in 2004 to assess the social accountability of medical institutions of Pakistan using the Grid developed by Charles Boelen. I found that there was a general lack of understanding towards social accountability and the need to be socially responsive to the society. There were however some positive findings as per my assessment in the survey which were that:

- the education was to some extent responding to the needs of students.
- the services were of moderately high quality and offered according to needs of the institution and to some extent responded to the needs of the society.
- research was generally of high quality and relevant to the needs of the country.

**Types of accountability**

Two kinds of accountabilities have been discussed and accepted at the international forums viz: The accountability to the medical graduates and the society in which these institutions are based.<sup>1,6</sup>

1. **Accountability to the students:** When a new student enters the university after a tedious selection process in our country either in a private or a public institution then that student becomes a consumer/customer for acquisition of medical and related knowledge. Ideally the student should then be treated like an elite customer and bestowed upon with all the privileges associated with high-class service, this will then bring about a change in the attitude of the student when she/he will graduate to serve the society. The academic staff has a moral obligation and it is their duty to develop the much publicized five star doctors for the country as described by Charles Boelen of WHO, the five stars are:<sup>7</sup>

- Care provider
- Decision-maker
- Communicator
- Community leader
- Manager

2. Accountability to the society: The medical Colleges are also accountable to the society, which means that the services provided should be available, accessible, ethical, humanitarian and affordable. The curriculum should include the priority health problems of the country and the focus of the health care providers should be on the problems of the patient and their prevention. A socially responsible school also provides evidence of impact of its performance and conduct to the society.

### The response of the developing world

There is a global consensus that the medical institutions should increase their capacity to respond to the needs and challenges of health care for citizens and society in general, in line with the core values of quality, equity, relevance and effectiveness.<sup>8</sup>

The University of Saskatchewan, Canada, developed the CARE model (Clinical activity, Advocacy, Research, Education and training) as a guiding tool for social accountability. The model is still under review however it does provide an example of a cultural shift in the attitude of the students and faculty.<sup>1</sup>

At the University of British Columbia (UBC), Canada there is now greater emphasis paid on making the future physicians more socially responsible. The UBC is trying to address this concern through changes in the curricula, training in the communities and research in social responsibility.<sup>2</sup>

According to Gibbs (2011), "the trend now is towards standards of social accountability--ensuring that graduates' competencies are shaped by the health and social needs of the local, national and even international communities in which they will serve".<sup>9</sup> But, in today's 'global village', if medical schools address the needs of their immediate community, who should address the needs of the wider global community?

With medical schools striving to produce fit-for-purpose graduates who will hopefully address the health needs of their country, is it now time for the medical education fraternity to extend their roles of social accountability to level this unlevel playing field? We believe so: the time has come for the profession to embrace a global accountability model and those responsible for all aspects of healthcare professional development to recognise their place within the wider global community."

According to Charles Boelen the time has come to address and measure the social accountability of all medical institutions.<sup>4</sup> It will be indeed in the benefit of the society, country and the institutions to foster collaborative research and development to address social accountability of medical institutions. The research will be able to appropriately shape the

curriculum and will be an area of great significance for the future of medical education.

In Pakistan we have not even started to address the social responsibility of medical institutions. I do not intend to negate the efforts of the institutions in improving their curricula to meet the needs of the students and institutions. Most medical institutions in the public and private sector are constantly working towards improving education, service and research. Intuitively major aspects of social accountability are being addressed without conscious effort. This in itself is commendable however it is time to make a conscious effort to address this in the vision, mission and policy documents of the institution. The curriculum of the future physicians of Pakistan will require pedagogical approaches that are innovative, collaborative, participatory, and responding to the needs of the country and the world. The leadership as well as each faculty member can contribute to making its school more socially accountable by reorienting education, research and service delivery programmes towards priority health needs and challenges of society and ensuring that their efforts have achieved intended outcomes and impact.

### So what should we do next?

- Quality improvement in medical education and evaluation standards to address social accountability must be addressed at the national level by accreditation bodies like, Pakistan Medical Dental Council and Higher Education Commission.
- Medical policies governing health care teaching institutions should address the social accountability of the institutions.
- A conscious effort should be made to develop an awareness of the social responsibility amongst the
  - Faculty
  - Students
  - Other stake holders
- An attempt should be made to develop partnerships between community & institutions.
- Students should be actively involved in curriculum development and review.

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