



Net Letter

Non-teaching institutions – But surely not non-academic

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Dear Editor,

I read with interest the article “Conducting research at non-teaching institutions: Challenges and solutions” by Goyal and Ravindran.^[1] I appreciate the authors for discussing an important subject in depth and suggesting solutions to common challenges to research in non-teaching institutions. Concurring with most of their views, I would like to bring up a few more facets of the issue.

The authors have aptly highlighted the importance of literature search when planning for a study. Efficient literature search is a skill and it could be imparted, developed or improved by training.^[2] This is one area which could be focused for capacity building for research, especially in non-teaching institutions.

Besides such purposeful literature search for a conceived research study, an aspiring researcher should read current literature regularly. Often the ideas for research would arise when one encounters clinical situations, in the context of the information gained from recent literature. To become a good singer, one needs to listen to a lot of music by others.^[3] Similarly to do good research, one needs to read and understand what others do in the field.

Clinicians usually assume an air of “knowing what they need to know,” whereas the starting point of a researcher is a “gap in knowledge.” Switching the “hats” between clinician and researcher can be a challenge, especially in non-teaching institutions which are not inherently oriented towards research.^[4]

For encouraging research, there should be attractive incentives. For individual researchers, it could be self-realization or self-actualization. Institutions may be sensitized about the potential to bring in research grants and enhancing their reputation and credibility in the society, through research.

Non-teaching institutions can gain much by collaborating with teaching institutions in research. Such collaborations can build on the positives of both. Collaboration among public and private institutions also would be rewarding. Besides, collaboration across specialties in the same institution too would be fruitful. Promoting a culture of in house journal clubs and conducting periodic continuing medical education programs aimed to promote and facilitate research also could be welcome steps.

Non-teaching institutions are definitely not non-academic ones. With sufficient intent, there is potential to create a lot of academic value there. In terms of geographic distribution and the patient load they handle, they probably outnumber teaching institutions. Tapping their enormous potential should be a priority for all stakeholders of research.

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Dr. Neelakandhan Asokan is on the editorial board of the Journal.

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