Second joint ICMR-CRI Indo-US workshop on research methodology: A student's perspective

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India is expected to become one of the leading countries where clinical research would be undertaken in a big way in the next few decades. This is likely to provide career opportunities to many aspiring young doctors. In an attempt to familiarize themselves with various aspects of clinical research, several undergraduate students are participating in short-term research projects under the guidance of faculty members.

However, students need to know more about resources available in the country that would enable them to get first-hand experience regarding various issues related to clinical research: raising funds, conforming to ethical guidelines and practical issues and problems that may crop up while actually conducting research. There is also a notion that one needs to go abroad to effectively pursue medical research. It is heartening to note that various government departments, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Indian Institute of Science and universities are now offering scholarships to undergraduate students to take up research projects in India itself.

The efforts of these organizations go beyond providing scholarships. They are now taking active steps for sensitizing and providing training in clinical research to young scientists. I had the opportunity to attend a workshop on Research Methodology that aimed at assisting students in developing the right mindset and approach towards clinical research, and helping them in acquiring the skill to transform their ideas into possible research topics. This workshop was organized by the Topiwala National Medical College and BYL Nair Charitable Hospital, Mumbai in association with the Cancer Research Institute (CRI), New York, USA and ICMR, India.

The workshop, conducted in an amiable atmosphere, provided an overview of various topics such as ethics in medical research, generating a research hypothesis, study designs, epidemiology and biostatistics through lectures, group discussion sessions and critical literature reviews. Presentations by students at the end of the workshop subjected them to an immediate peer review, which helped them make their study designs more fundamentally sound. The participants benefited from the workshop as it provided guidance regarding the formulation and execution of ideas. It also helped in bridging the gaps in epidemiology and statistics, by stressing on the practical applications, an element that is often missing when such topics are taught in the medical college. At the workshop, students used computers to familiarize themselves about the various statistical tests they could use. The success of this workshop could be gauged not only by the enthusiasm that participants demonstrated or by the intensity of their active participation; but by the fact that many of them actually developed the confidence in designing, presenting and defending their own research protocols! Although, five days may be too little for learning about all the intricacies of clinical research, the workshop did provide students with a good start. More such workshops held for the student fraternity would help in developing a strong force of young doctors within the country, who would then be good researchers and a support to the medical needs of the population.