sectors spread over a wider geographic area, so that the research findings will be useful to provide initial advice to this industry.

V. P. Sudhashree, K. Rohith, K. Srinivas
Srinivasa Institute of Occupational Health, Bangalore, India

Correspondence to author: VP Sudhashree, Consultant London School of Hygien and Tropical Medicine, No. 206, 15th B cross, 11th B main, West of chord road, Mahalakshmipuram, Bangalore–86, India

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Distance learning courses in occupational medicine – Method and good practice

Sir,
I read the article on ‘Distance learning courses in occupational medicine – Methods and good practice’. The subject raised by authors is interesting and there is need for review of the Occupational Medicine (OM) training in India. Authors have written, ‘Almost 100% of all postgraduate teaching in OM is done by distance education in the UK’.

The aim of this letter is to enlighten readers more about the OM training in UK. Some of the content articulated here are personal opinions and experience. The Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM), UK offers generalist qualifications aimed at part-time practitioners, and a specialist training for those wishing to work in the field full-time. The details can be found on the faculty’s website: http://www.facoccmed.ac.uk and following is a brief description of it.

A Diploma in OM is a basic level qualification aimed at General Practitioners working part time in the OM. It is not a part of the formal training route (Specialist Registrar Training) to a membership or entry onto the specialist register of the General Medical Council of the UK. Entry to the diploma examination depends on further defined experience or training and 6 months of distance-learning course from University of Manchester is approved toward this. In my experience, the diploma examination of the faculty may be equivalent to the AFIH examination of the central labour institute.

Entry into the specialist registrar (SpR) training is lot more competitive. Two years of post registration experience in mandatory before embarking on this route. Candidates appear before a Regional PostGraduate Dean’s Appointment Advisory Committee for a selection process. Higher Specialist Training (HST) is conducted in the faculty approved training posts supervised by consultant Occupational Physicians. Posts are available in the National Health Service (NHS), in a wide variety of industries and within the Defence Medical Services. It follows an agreed training programme and takes a minimum of 4 years. SpRs are subject to annual assessments by the regional postgraduate dean and they have to pass Associateship of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (AFOM) Exam. An additional mandatory requirement for SpRs is the submission of a dissertation. Membership of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (MFOM) can only be awarded once HST is complete.

In addition to 6 months course, University of Manchester runs a 3-year distance learning MSc course. Those courses are open to overseas candidates. The MSc course is useful in preparing for the AFOM examination but it is not an alternative to the 4 years of full-time SpR training. Overall, the OM training in the UK is a stringent and structured process.

A PG Certificate course conducted at Chennai appears to be a good step forward. I agree that majority of company doctors in India cannot leave their workplace for a full-time training but not all company doctors aim to become a consultant in the OM. Only attending a distance learning course may not suffice and a formal structured training is required for acquiring a specialist grade. There is a formal residency program in Surgery and Medicine in India then why the OM is considered as a subject that can be mastered with less
Indian Association of Occupational Health (IAOH) has been a very active professional body in this field. A structured training program can be designed and monitored by similar organisations.

C. Mutalik
AFOM, Occupational Physician, Southampton, UK

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