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Introspection by a Medical Teacher on the Present Status of Medical Education in Libya

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To The Editor: I had the privilege of teaching in Garyounis Medical University and then Al Arab Medical University at Benghazi during its golden period from 1980 to 1990. During that period the university had eminent teachers of great caliber from India, United States of America and the United Kingdom. Around 150 to 200 students were admitted to the course. The medium of instruction was English. The student attendance was compulsory for the practical as well as lecture classes. There were no private centres of instruction. The students were very interested in their education and had shown great interest in learning. Under the tutelage of eminent teachers the students completed their medical training and proudly occupy great positions in leading hospitals and teaching institutions in Libya and all around the globe. It is a proud moment for any teacher to cherish and witness such great achievements accomplished by the students whom he/she has taught. However, it gives me no pleasure to see the standard of the medical education in Libya slipping despite the massive expansion in the number of medical schools resulting in putting enormous pressure on the scarce resources. At present, Libya has 25000 students in nine medical schools [1], compared to just 9000 practicing doctors, and a total population of around 6 million [2].

In this article I would like to propose some practical measures that may help in reviving medical education in Libya.

Medical Council of Libya

Libya could have a national body for the country by the name of Medical Council of

Libya (MCL). The duties and responsibilities of such a council are to maintain, manage and motivate medical and allied education to flourish in the country. MCL may have a president, secretary, governing executive council and a team of inspectors to check, guide and steer the educational activities of these premier institutions. MCL should be an autonomous body that will coordinate and regulate medical, dental and pharmacy education. It will have its own set of guidelines for medical universities and institutions to run their courses which will include the following:

i) Set the vision and the goals of medical universities,

ii) State the required qualification for candidates admission to the courses, such as common entrance test and psychometric evaluation for the potential students,

iii) Selection and evaluation process of the teaching staff such as professors and associate professors,

iv) Basic structure stipulation for each department, area, number of beds for each specialty in the hospital and other requirements to deliver the curriculum including different infra-structure facilities such as lecture halls, seminar halls and laboratories,

v) To guarantee the required international standard for the universities' graduates.

Admission to medical school

It will be wise to admit students to the medical school after they have completed their Bachelor's degree in science. This is vital for a country with limited population. A student with a degree in science will be mature; will have a good command of English and will be more suitable for admission to the medical course.

Academic councils and board of studies at the University level

Every university must have a senate and a syndicate. The senate will have academics, lawyers and educationists selected only on their merits. Among them a syndicate may be formed with five to seven members who will supervise, enact, and pass resolutions to guarantee smooth running of the university.

Postgraduate basic medical sciences courses

There is a constant need to have an internal pool of qualified teachers in basic medical sciences to teach and develop research in the medical universities. The courses could be revamped to suit the needs of each university. The major universities now have established postgraduate courses in basic medical sciences. The basic medical sciences include pre-clinical subjects like anatomy, physiology, biochemistry pharmacology, microbiology and pathology. The postgraduates who are trained need to be oriented towards teaching and research. All these postgraduate students need to be trained in fundamentals of anatomy, physiology and biochemistry in the first year of their course [3,4]. In the following two years they could be trained in their respective specialties. The curriculum must include training in communication skills and medical education. The students have part of their programme devoted to undertaking and completing a research project. The total duration of a postgraduate programme could be three or four years. The degree must be awarded by the medical school of the university. The university therefore needs to have an Academic Council and separate Board of Studies to regulate these courses. The establishment of such bodies will help to maintain the standard of education.

Centralized laboratory and a modern library to help research

As postgraduate courses depend partly upon research hence the need to develop the research facilities in the universities. The two most fundamental requirements for any research institution apart from its academic staff are a full-fledged laboratory and a modern library. The University must have a centralized laboratory where all the basic equipment could be stationed catering to the needs

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of various departments with a log system to avoid duplication. The most important component of such a laboratory is a maintenance department with a research scientist trained in instrumentation and biomedical engineers to supervise and keep the instruments working. The purchase department must have a representative who is well-versed in laboratory chemicals and instruments to scrutinize and approve the indent forwarded by different departments for purchase and delivery. The university library along with its electronic facilities and networking need to have a continual flow of major journals and a documentation centre. The documentation centre will be responsible for providing reprints of articles to the research students along with maintaining current contents.

It is very important to understand that "research is living knowledge". Therefore it is highly important for the proposed MCL to stress the importance of continued medical research in different medical colleges. Instead of laying more emphasis on just qualification and years of service put in by the candidate for a particular post, councils must emphasis the importance of the research potential of teachers. Such steps will help encourage medical research to be carried out in medical colleges [5, 6].

Finally I would like to point out that my academic career did get a boost by serving this noble land of Libya. It gave me respect and dignity in my society and allowed me to get recognition in my field in the most humble way. The students and teachers in particular and citizens of Libya in general are the most loveable and respectable people. A refreshing change to modernize medical education in Libya is needed. Once the initial and difficult recovery steps have been taken, no one can stop the country from reaching what it desires. I can even say that Libyan institutions could reach the excellence of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, or the Indian Institute of Technology!. At least this is my dream for a land which gave me a second home.

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