

COMMENTARY

Improving Philippine ophthalmic research

Our views on research should be reoriented. We should regard research as a source of pride and a means of advancement and recognition, not merely as an obligation.

WE, FILIPINO ophthalmologists, can take pride in our excellent clinical skills. We truly are among the best in the world. However, proficient as we are in the clinics, our competence in research is severely wanting. Research is paramount, as it is the driving force behind the advancement of medical science and a source of clinical guidance.

Currently, much of our output depends on research conducted by individual residents for completion of requirements. This is in contrast to major medical research centers overseas where production is consultant-driven and team-oriented. This allows them to generate papers that are meaningful, useful, and respectable.

The following are problems associated with our predominantly resident-based research culture:

1. Residents are novices who do not yet have a full grasp of the science of ophthalmology. As such, they may not be equipped properly to formulate their own questions and execute studies properly. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the insight of a resident, as he/she may have a fresh, unjaded perspective of ophthalmology.

2. Residents have a relatively short, finite amount of time to conceptualize, execute, and write up a study all for the sake of requirement completion. They are often not able to gather a sufficient number of subjects and complete a thorough, well-executed, well-analyzed paper. We, therefore, have a wealth of preliminary studies and a dearth of completed ones. Good research takes years of effort and requires continuity. As such, it is recommended that the approach to research be

directed away from the singular effort of the individual resident to teamwork at the institutional level. This is the only way continuity can be assured.

3. Good research requires big numbers. As individuals, it is extremely difficult to acquire the big number of subjects required for statistical significance. We should, therefore, promote inter-institutional cooperation coordinated by the subspecialty societies.

4. While we would like to encourage residents to participate in research (both team-oriented and individual), we should probably deemphasize completion of a research paper as a requisite for graduation. Many major training institutions overseas are cognizant of the fact that it is difficult to finish a meaningful study during a resident's short, finite term. Instead of requiring them to complete individual papers prior to graduation, they are encouraged to join consultant-led research teams. This way, papers can be continued and published even after the resident's departure from the institution.

One may argue that deemphasizing this requirement would result in a decrease in production and take away the experience of conducting research. However, the task of conducting a study under pressure is often unpalatable due to the stress involved. This, unfortunately, has resulted in the prevailing resentful attitude toward research in our community, in turn leading to meager, mediocre production. Research can be an enjoyable, rewarding experience if performed and supervised properly. *Promoting research as a continuing team effort while deemphasizing it as a requisite for graduation would lead to an improvement in the quality and quantity of output.*

5. Due to the lack of quality papers, we have difficulty publishing. Without quality papers, we cannot achieve international recognition and respectability. We will also have difficulty sustaining the PHILIPPINE JOURNAL OF OPHTHALMOLOGY. Conversely, we have good papers that remain unpublished. We should encourage

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publication, as this is the only way to disseminate ideas widely. Unpublished information is useless, as it remains a secret of the authors.

Our views on research should be reoriented. We should regard research as a source of pride and a means of advancement and recognition, not merely as an obligation. We should strive to publish our ideas not only locally, but internationally as well. The focus of the research-paper contest should be reoriented—recognition should be given not only to the primary author and his/her institution, but to the whole team and all of the institutions involved. This would encourage active participation of all, rather than passive interaction alone. Only by working together can we realize our common goal of achieving greatness in our chosen field.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Effective this issue, the PHILIPPINE JOURNAL OF OPHTHALMOLOGY will be published twice a year instead of quarterly.

