

## Choice of career by medical students

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Choice of career by medical students is an intriguing topic. The present study addressing the factors leading to choice of surgery as a career not only marks the beginning of such studies done among our students in Nepal but also makes us realize the importance of this issue. Although students are sure about the specialty they want to pursue at the time of entrance, most are influenced by internal and external factors throughout their undergraduate schooling. Personal interest, previous positive experience during clerkship, job opportunities, influence from a mentor, life style and financial rewards, are shown to be the determining factors<sup>1</sup>. Whatever the reason, the choice is an independent and random process.

Most of the international studies done to address this issue have shown that the clinical subjects like Medicine, Surgery, Gynecology/Obstetrics and Pediatrics still continue to be the subjects of choice<sup>2,3</sup>. As medical science and technology become more sophisticated, the spotlight has been focused on specialties and super specialties<sup>4</sup>. Consequently, many medical students appear to find basic sciences and primary care less appealing<sup>5</sup>.

After the formal start of medical education in Nepal, the requirement of teachers for basic science subjects like Anatomy, Physiology and Biochemistry was felt. There was scarcity of teachers and we largely had to depend on our southern neighbor to fill this vacuum. There opened a new career opportunity for the medical students but their choice for clinical sciences prevailed. Although development of medical sciences was possible due to the development of basic sciences, it could not be the career choices of medical students. They aspired to be doctors attending patients, executing procedural skills but lacking the basics.

Researches done on this subject has shown that students look up upon their mentors. Teachers who are judged as high quality teachers have the greatest influence on

student career choice by up to fourfold. When students judge a teacher as negative role model they will turn away from that field. Hence teachers have a big role to play in career choices of medical students. To attract students to take less popular career choices these teachers have to make extra effort and be a positive role model<sup>6</sup>. The role of basic science teachers cannot be overemphasized.

Should medical students be allowed to choose their career randomly or should it be a structured and guided policy based process broad enough to incorporate all aspects of national need? This question needs to be answered after brain storming and discussion by all stakeholders.

An effective health system depends on appropriate skill mix and adequate distribution of health professionals in all specialties and geographical locations<sup>5</sup>. As the student's choices of career affects the future availabilities of medical doctors in different specialties, the career choices should be a systematic scientific process. A lot of thought and planning needs to be done to balance availability as per need. Too many specialist and super specialist may lead to disease specific treatment with high technology but the preventive aspect will be neglected. Doctors will be waiting for the disease so that they can intervene. On the other hand, if generalists are more only the tip of the iceberg will be evident and treatment will be as generalized and non specific as those done by *Baidhyas* and *Hakims* of yester years. A good healthcare system depends on balance between basic science, specialties and super specialties. Thus students should choose their career as per need of the society and country. Medical council should do research and survey to delineate the need of the country as a whole and accordingly make guidelines for the choice of career by medical students and strengthen the fields that are being overlooked by them. Specific guidelines, aptitude tests, counseling and rehearsing may be the tools for medical students to make right career choices.

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