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Perspective of Postgraduate Medical Students on the need for Foundation Course after the Admission in Postgraduate Medical College

Dr. Sushmita¹, Dr. Mandar Sadawarte², Dr. Akhil Soni³, Dr. Ashwini Mala*¹, Dr. Deepika Sadawarte⁴,

¹ Junior resident, Department of Community Medicine, Grant Government Medical College and Sir JJ Group of Hospitals, Mumbai, 400008, India

² Assistant Professor, Department of Community Medicine, Grant Government Medical College and Sir JJ Group of Hospitals, Mumbai, 400008, India

³ Senior Resident, Department of Community Medicine, Grant Government Medical College and Sir JJ Group of Hospitals, Mumbai, 400008, India

⁴ Assistant Professor, Department of Community Medicine, Seth G. S. Medical College and KEM Hospital, Mumbai, 400012, India

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ABSTRACT

Background -Purpose To assess the perspective of postgraduate medical students on the need for foundation courses after admission in postgraduate college in a medical college in India. **Methods:** This observational study involved 180 first-year postgraduate students who joined in the academic year 2022 from various medical colleges. Experts validated a questionnaire administered via Google Form to assess their knowledge, perspective, and attitude toward introducing a foundation course in the postgraduate curriculum. **Results:** 92 (51.1%) students were in the age group of 26-30 years. There was almost an equal distribution between male and female genders and the paraclinical and clinical specialties. 86 (47.8%) had heard about the foundation course and very few (1.7%) knew about the purpose of the foundation course in undergraduate courses. Postgraduate courses proved challenging for 153 (85%) of respondents due to work-life balance, difficult patients/colleagues, and educational demands. 97 (53.9%) felt that undergraduate education was adequately prepared for postgraduate courses. 149 (82%) felt a foundation course could help all students overcome these challenges. 170 (94.4%), said they would attend a foundation course if offered. 158 (88%) believed such a course would be a valuable addition to postgraduate medical education. **Conclusion:** The findings of this study highlight the strong interest shown by postgraduate medical students in a foundation course that can be included in the postgraduate curriculum. This study showed the perceived value of a foundation course in postgraduate medical education, addressing challenges and garnering strong support for its integration.

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Introduction

Background: India's education system is experiencing a significant transformation through the implementation of competency-based medical education, which emphasizes the development of specific skills and abilities required for success in the medical profession.[1] Effective governance of health systems is dependent on the regulation of medical education and health professionals. The shift towards integrated medical education is expected to decrease fragmentation in the medical course, enhance learning outcomes. [2,3]

A foundation course is a brief educational curriculum that aims to equip students with the skills they need to be successful in a particular field of study. The foundation course was proposed in undergraduate medical curriculum to orient institutional infrastructure, enhance professional ethics, and leadership abilities.

Corresponding Author :

Dr. Ashwini Mala*

Junior resident, Department of Community Medicine,
Grant Government Medical College and Sir JJ Group of Hospitals,
Mumbai, 400008, India

e-mail: dr.ashwini1097@gmail.com

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Medical student perceptions of their learning environment affect their sense of well-being and their academic achievements, and may influence their behaviour. This approach of learning provides a seamless link between levels of medical education by using authentic experiences based in professional life.

The main goal of orientation programmes for students who are transitioning from undergraduate school to postgraduate study in academic institutions across the world is to familiarise them with the campus environment and academic programmes and assist them in adjusting to it.

Following the postgraduate examination and counselling, students enrol in a new college where they must join their respective specialties but have no prior knowledge of the hospital management, the operation of other departments that are related to their own, ethical dilemmas, or the paperwork in addition to the introduction to research projects needed in that hospital and course as very few medical students take part in any research projects. [4,5]

The objective of postgraduate medical education, a crucial phase in the training of physicians, is the development of advanced knowledge and skills in specific medical specialties. However, for many people, the shift from undergraduate to postgraduate medical studies can be challenging

due to the significant rise in academic rigour and clinical responsibilities. Foundation course can be proved advantageous to newly joined postgraduate medical students as it helps to fill the knowledge gaps, improves clinical skills, build confidence, and provide an opportunity to network with their peers and with faculty members which is particularly useful for students who are new to a postgraduate medical college or who are pursuing a new medical specialty. [5–9]

There can be advantages of introducing postgraduate foundation course for all the students. First, an equitable opportunity for all students can be assured and the same extent of knowledge is offered for all students. Second, postgraduate medical students can identify any areas of weakness and focus on strengthening those skills before commencing their postgraduate medical education through attending a foundation course. The decision of whether foundation courses should be required for postgraduate medical students ultimately depends on several variables, including the institution's resources, the student's individual requirements, and the profession's standards of variables, including the institution's resources, the student's individual requirements, and the expectations of the profession.

Objectives

The aim of this study is to evaluate postgraduate medical students' knowledge, and attitude about the requirement for a foundation course in postgraduate medical courses following admission. The results of this study can be used to pinpoint the potential advantages of a foundation course and to guide the formulation of plans for enhancing postgraduate medical education.

Methods

Study Design: A cross-sectional study **Setting:** The study was conducted among students of various medical college within one month. After receiving informed consent from the study participants, the online questionnaire as Google form was shared through different social media websites. Strict confidentiality for the participants was maintained during the data collection. The responses were collected, entered, and analysed in Excel version 2021.

Ethics statement The study was conducted after the prior ethics review from the Institutional Ethical Committee with approval number No. IEC/Pharm/ RP/166/Sep/2023.

Participants: The study was conducted among the first-year postgraduate medical students who joined in academic year 2022 of various Indian medical colleges who were selected through non-probability purposive sampling.

Study size: The study's sample size was calculated using the formula $4pq/L^2$, where the p was 50% assuming 50% of the population will participate in the study. [10] A permitted error of 8% was considered with 10% of non-response rate. The sample size comes out to be 180. **Statistical methods** The data was analysed using appropriate software Microsoft Excel Office 2021. The results were calculated in the form of frequency and percentages.

Results

Table 1. Profile of the study participants

Age		
	21-25 years	40 (22.2%)
	26-30 years	92 (51.1%)
	31-35 years	43 (23.9%)
	More than 36 years	5 (2.8%)
Gender	Female	99 (55%)
	Male	81 (45%)
Specialty	Paraclinical	89 (49.4%)
	Clinical	91 (50.4%)

Out of 180 students, only 86 (47.8%) participants had heard about foundation course, only 67 (37.3%) knew about the foundation course in undergraduate medical course, only 3 (1.7%) knew the content and structure of foundation course in under graduation and a total of 78 (43.3%) knew the purpose of foundation course in postgraduate curriculum.

Table 2. Perspectives on Foundation course

	Yes	No
Do you feel that your undergraduate medical education adequately prepared you for a postgraduate course?	53.9%	46.1%
Do you think a foundation course would be helpful in your postgraduate course?	79.4%	20.6%
Do you think a foundation course would benefit all postgraduate medical student?	86.1%	13.9%
Would you be willing to attend a foundation course if it were offered?	94.4%	5.6%
Do you think a foundation course would be a valuable addition to the postgraduate medical curriculum?	87.8%	12.2%

Table 3. Perspectives on Contents of Foundation course

The essential skills and knowledge areas that should be covered in a foundation course	a) Medical ethics and professionalism	5.0%
	b) Basic clinical skills	3.9%
	c) Patient communication and management	4.4%
	d) All of the above	86.7%
Topics or areas in foundation course that should cover to help in better understanding of the postgraduate course	a) Introduction to thesis	27.2%
	b) Orientation of working of other departments	22.8%
	c) Documentation, medical procedures and techniques	41.7%
	d) Others	8.3%
Mode of assessments be conducted in a foundation course	a) Written exams	8.3%
	b) Clinical skills assessments	11.1%
	c) Multi-source feedback from supervisors and colleagues	11.1%
	d) All of the above	69.4%

While 53.9% of the students indicated that their undergraduate medical education adequately prepared them for postgraduate courses, a significant 79.4% expressed the belief that a foundation course would be beneficial during their postgraduate medical studies, and this association was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Notably, a substantial association was observed between students who perceived the value of a foundation course and those who believed it would be a valuable addition to the postgraduate medical curriculum ($p < 0.001$). Similarly, a strong association was identified between students willing to attend a foundation course if offered and those who considered it a valuable addition to the curriculum ($p < 0.001$).

Discussion

The results of the study demonstrate the extent to which Indian postgraduate medical students feel that a foundation course should be part of their postgraduate training. Their anticipation is an indication that they recognise how well the foundation course can help them with the various issues that arise in their postgraduate studies, such as juggling rigorous coursework, striking a balance between work and personal life, and navigating complex patient relationships.

The above findings underscore the students' desire for educational enhancements and suggest a strong case for the incorporation of a well-structured foundation course into postgraduate medical education, potentially bridging gaps and bolstering the readiness of students for the challenges of their advanced studies. This insight supports the need

for continued research and curriculum development to address the evolving requirements of medical education. It's essential to highlight the concerning fact that a notable percentage of respondents expressed a lack of confidence in the adequacy of their undergraduate medical education to excel in postgraduate medical studies. This raises important questions about the readiness of students and the need for institutions to address this issue systematically. These study results align with the broader context of competency-based medical education, which underscores the cultivation of specific skills and competencies crucial for success in the medical field.

Competency-Based Medical Education is not only gaining global recognition but is also acknowledged as an essential transformation in medical education.[3] By articulating their demand for a foundation course, postgraduate medical students advocate for a more structured and comprehensive educational approach.

Our study draws support from prior research, consistently recognizing the value of foundation courses in medical education.[7,8] Previous studies have demonstrated the substantial advantages of providing undergraduate medical students with well-structured foundation courses. Research carried out at several Indian medical colleges demonstrated that these courses improve students' comprehension of foundational concepts, strengthen their capacity for clinical reasoning, and better equip them to meet the demands of medical education. The beneficial results show how important it is to include these foundation programmes in medical education.[1,9,11] The outcomes of our study resonate with these prior experiences, underscoring medical students' eagerness to embrace innovative educational approaches that enhance their competence and readiness for the medical profession.

The current literature is lacking in-depth information regarding the incorporation of foundation courses into postgraduate medical education, especially when compared to their established use in undergraduate programs. Conducting thorough and systematic research in this specific area holds the promise of uncovering valuable insights and potential benefits. A comprehensive examination of these courses and their influence on postgraduate medical training has the potential to illuminate a pathway for future enhancements, ultimately elevating the quality of education and the preparedness of medical professionals. By addressing this existing research gap through rigorous analysis, we may unveil opportunities for educational reform, leading to improved outcomes in postgraduate medical education.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the strong interest shown by postgraduate medical students in a foundation course that can be included in postgraduate curriculum. The majority of participants responded that such a programme could address the difficulties they face while pursuing their postgraduate degrees, including managing the demanding academic requirements, maintaining a work-life balance, and navigating complex patient interactions.

The foundation program's structure and content can be modified to accommodate the particular difficulties experienced by postgraduate medical students based on their area of specialization. These findings emphasize the promising prospect of integrating a foundation program into postgraduate medical education within the Indian context.

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