

Correspondence

History of medicine in the undergraduate medical curriculum in India

I read the article, 'History of medicine in undergraduate medical curriculum in India' by Ahmad, Kant and Gupta, with great interest.¹ I wish to highlight a few points. I think we must sensitize our young graduates regarding our rich legacy in the field of medicine and the way practice and ethos of medicine have evolved over the millennia. The authors have well argued the necessity to teach history of medicine citing the discovery of ether, smallpox vaccination, role of citrus fruits in preventing scurvy, how cigarette smoking was found to have a link with cancers and about our great ancient surgeon, Sushruta, considered to be the Father of Surgery in India. I may point out that Sushruta is not only the Father of Surgery but he is also credited to be the Father of Plastic Surgery, the first one to describe the entity of diabetes (*madhumeh*: honey-like urine) and the one who advocated exercise for the prevention of diabetes.² Besides Sushruta, there are two other great ancient physicians, Caraka and Vagbhatt, who have made enormous contributions to internal medicine popularly known as '*Kaya Chikitsa*'. The trio, Sushruta, Caraka and Vagbhatt are known as *Vrihattryi* (the three greats) of the ancient system of medicine.

The authors have rightly advocated the need for 4 hours of lectures in the first 6 months of the entry year of MBBS and then integrating historical perspectives in each discipline at appropriate points. Interestingly, the authors have given a comprehensive table on teaching of history of medicine in the top 25 medical institutions of

India including Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi. It may be mentioned here that BHU had envisaged including some formal classes on history of medicine in its medical college from its inception in 1960, but ironically the then Medical Council of India did not approve of this and BHU had to reluctantly drop this proposition.³ As regards Hamdard Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, it had made a humble beginning to sensitize its students from the first year (1961) by having an introductory lecture on History of Medicine by the dean of the institute. Further, its various corridors have mounted portraits of great physicians in disciplines of anatomy, pharmacology, pathology, medicine, cardiology and community medicine and surgery.⁴ It is heartening to note that such a practice is one of the recommendations put forth by the authors. One may say that by teaching the history of medicine to our young graduates in their formative years, we are not only enlightening their minds with our noble heritage but also igniting their grey cells for future challenges and discovery.

Conflicts of interest. None declared

Shridhar Dwivedi
Department of Cardiology
National Heart Institute
New Delhi, India
shridhar.dwivedi@gmail.com

REFERENCES

- 1 Ahmad A, Kant S, Gupta SK. History of medicine in undergraduate medical curriculum in India. *Natl Med J India* 2019;**32**:360–4.
- 2 Dwivedi G, Dwivedi S. Sushruta—The clinician–teacher par excellence. *Indian J Chest Dis Allied Sci* 2007;**49**:243–4.
- 3 Lakhota S. A Legendary Dream—IMS BHU. In: Lakhota S (ed). *A legendary dream—IMS BHU*. Varanasi, India: Dr Siddharth Lakhota; 2020:6.
- 4 Patwari AK. *Hamdardians* (magazine of the Hamdard Institute of Medical Sciences and Research) 2013;**1**:82.