

Letters to the editor

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Intercalated degrees and research projects: building academic foundations

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Dear editor:

We read the article by Avila and Rodríguez-Restrepo [1] with great interest. Basic skills required to publish research are exercised at medical school by presentations and essay writing but there is often a step up to publish in a peer-reviewed journal of present research at an international level. We note that there are many ways to get undergraduate medical students involved in research. One way includes the writing of letters or comments on existing articles [2]. Another way includes the integration of research projects into an undergraduate curriculum, which no doubt requires motivated and dedicated mentors [3]. Whilst research projects may include primary research studies, they can also be literature reviews that can help develop generic research skills including appraisal and analysis of literature.

A unique concept that we would like to introduce is intercalated degrees which is commonplace in British, Australian and New Zealand programmes [4]. This is where medical students take a year out of their degree to do the final year of another degree, which is typically scientific, e.g. BSc, MSc. This defers graduation from the medical degree by one year. Not only do such degrees improve subjective understanding of research methodology and extra-medical interests [4] but also subsequent better medical degree performance and job prospects [5] as compared to those who did not undertake intercalated degrees. However despite this the extra cost incurred and time spent during an intercalated degree can act as a deterrent for some students. Furthermore, secondary benefits of such degrees include conference presentations and publications.

Primary research is a single way of entering the academic world which can often be time consuming and difficult for the inexperienced medical students. There are numerous ways of gaining a foothold in academia including integrated medical research projects, writing letters and intercalated degrees that undoubtedly have direct and indirect benefits in clinical practice.

Notes

Conflicts of interests

The authors have completed the conflict of interests declaration form from the ICMJE, and declare that they have any conflict of interests associated with the subject of this letter. Forms can be requested to the responsible author or the editorial direction of the *Journal*.

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