

# Changing opinions about research by Saudi medical students

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## Dear editor

After analyzing the appealing communication, “Changing opinions about research by Saudi medical students,” authored by Ahmad Abulaban et al,<sup>1</sup> I would like to offer some complementary data on that issue rooted in the 25 years experience carried out in our medical school and related to an extracurricular and voluntary program of scientific formation in medical sciences for undergraduates. In this regard, previous considerations and results<sup>2,3</sup> are updated and summarized. During that time period, 614 undergraduate students (400 women and 214 men) were admitted to that program as initiation fellows, 471 of them also fulfilling the subsequent advanced phase. Consequently, 76% of the students completed the biennial challenge. Three quarters of the research projects accepted and assessed during the 25-year period focused on biological aspects while the remaining ones were centered in educational and psycho-social features. While a total predominance of medical students was evidenced until 2004, nursing and speech therapy students increased from 2005 onward. Between 1991 and 2016, the quantitative achievements of the program were as follows: participation in 1957 communications in scientific meetings and collaboration in 267 and 200 papers published in national and international journals, respectively. Similarly, indirect contributions to 55 PhD theses were recorded. Qualitatively, the main competences acquired after carrying out both the stages were, as formerly reported, satisfactory literature search, critical reading of scientific papers, planning of research activities, feasibility, quality and pertinence of the projects, training with different procedures, data registration as well as proper wording of progress and final reports, abstracts, short communications, and full-length papers, among others.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, a poll systematically applied after finishing both the stages revealed 95% of positive results related to the acquired competences and the resulting outcomes. The simultaneous creation and development of the Scientific Association of Medical Students strengthened its advantages and generated a fruitful interaction between this institution and the program under consideration. To sum up, research training in undergraduates becomes an advisable practice for their future professional and quotidian life.

## Disclosure

The author reports no conflicts of interest in this communication.

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