

## **Rationale for Thesis in Post Graduate Courses: A singular experience**

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In 1974, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, and the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Research (PGI), Chandigarh, reduced all post graduate medical courses, leading to the degree of MD/MS, from 3 to 2 years. This they achieved by eliminating the writing of thesis. The rationale for this was that more qualified MD/MS could be produced over the next 10 years. Also, to test whether thesis impacted post graduation in any way.

Both these institutions are the pinnacles for medical education in India. They were testing a hypothesis inadvertently I became part of their experiment. I joined MD Pathology, at AIIMS in 1974 for a 2 years course, with out thesis. Interestingly, the student instruction manual given to each post graduate student in Pathology, at the time of admission stated: ‘Active participation in research is compulsory for every trainee. Writing a thesis is an essential requirement for the MD degree’.

There were positive and negative aspects to this experiment. I sailed through MD in two years. It was hassle free, and I maintained my independence. The time spent in the library was used productively to gathering knowledge and not for writing and re-writing of the thesis. All in all, it was a fruitful two years period.

The negative aspects of lack of thesis became apparent when I went looking for a job. I had little idea of research or concept of paper writing. I had no mentor, no one to write that extra line as a recommendation that would ensure a placement in the US. All this was because I had

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not dedicated one complete year, as an assistant to any one faculty member in Pathology, while writing a thesis.

I joined UCMS as a permanent demonstrator in 1976. This ensured a teaching position in the Department of Pathology. I struggled as a guide for with my first thesis, when the department got recognition for MD.

Interestingly, three years later AIIMS and PGI reverted back to 3 years MD with thesis. The impact of the 'no thesis' on these institutions of higher learning, was reflected by a decrease in the numbers of research publications, uniformly, across the table, for each department. In other words thesis contributed to research. It was beneficial to both post graduate student as well as faculty.

Although research experience can never replace solid medical training, it is a mandatory additional requirement, needed when the merits of a candidate are being assessed for a job particularly in the teaching fraternity. The quality of a research publication helps discriminate between candidates.

Thesis writing is a record of your research endeavor. It fine tunes your thinking, organizational, and problem solving skills. These, along with a systematic approach to a problem, keenness of observations and ability of expression are useful attributes, needed to be acquired, even if the career aim is private practice.

What had other post graduates endured while writing a thesis? This was my next searched. One publication that was insightful, felt, that not too much was gained by writing thesis.<sup>1</sup> They found many shortfalls in the guide, and considered it a mere formality.

The negative attributes incriminating the guide included poor understanding of research methodology, lack of time spent with the student, inability to provide infrastructure for research,

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and financial problems arising during the thesis. Students felt that the thesis was a mere formality and they could get by with data fabrication and plagiarism. The authors suggest methods to improve student interest in thesis: by standardizing the work, time frame for submission, ensure one publication at the time of completion of PG course, and awards for best thesis both at the institutional and national level in each subject.

**Reference and further reading:**

1. Hyderi A, Ravikiran. PG thesis: Idealistic Vs Realistic. Indian J Pediatr 2006;73:373-4.
2. Kabra SK, Verma IC. Thesis during MD: Must or bust? Indian J Pediatr 2007;74:72-3.

