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Evaluation of undergraduate research experiences among the pre-intern medical graduates of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo

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The Faculty of Medicine Colombo (FMC) has a well-structured research programme in the Community Stream and electives programme that yields a wealth of research annually. It is a vital opportunity for students to go through the process of research and contribute to research publications. This study describes the undergraduate research experience at the FMC. A descriptive cross sectional study was done at FMC involving 192 undergraduates who had completed their end of course examination in 2010. A self administered questionnaire was used to assess the research experience in undergraduates.

The Community Stream research programme studies were mainly done in a hospital setting: 49% (92/192). Clinical topics such as rheumatology, neurology, cardiology etc together made up 31% (59/192) of the areas studied and reproductive health 27% (53/192). Patients were used as the population by 22% (43/192). 75% (144/192) of research was descriptive. 44% (85/192) of studies were communicated at a scientific forum. Only 6 (7%) presented their work as publications in indexed journals. The elective programme was utilized for research by only 19% (36/192) and 70% (26/36) of them were descriptive and chose the hospital setting and 17 did it on patients. 58% (21/36) were communicated in scientific fora, of which 5 (14%) were indexed publications. In both research programmes, lack of interest was the reason for not attempting publication. Eight undergraduates had presented at foreign fora. Grants were received by only 4 undergraduates. None of the travellers were fully sponsored. 40% of undergraduates preferred a career as a medical researcher. It can be concluded that most of the undergraduate research of FMC goes unpublished. The clinical set up yields majority of the research. Clinicians may have a role to play in encouraging clinical research and publication.