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Safia Bano

KEMU, Lahore Pakistan, safiabano207@gmail.com

Sarwar Jamil Siddique

Aga Khan University, Karachi

Ahsan Numan Numan

KEMU, Lahore Pakistan

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NEUROLOGY TRAINING IN PAKISTAN: 2020-2025

Dr Safia Bano¹, Prof. Dr Sarwar Jamil Siddique², Prof. Dr Ahsan Numan³

¹Assistant Professor Neurology, KEMU, Lahore. ²Professor of Neurology, AKU, Karachi. ³Professor of Neurology, KEMU, Lahore.

Correspondence to: Dr Safia Bano, KEMU, Lahore Email: safiabano207@gmail.com

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As the year 2019 comes to end, many advances in neurology has been occurred over worldwide and is still going on. The emergence of new devices and drugs will help neurologists with additional therapeutic options to optimize the patient care especially in more complex cases. Antibody therapies especially monoclonal antibodies are flooding the landscape in nearly every discipline of neurology is no exception. We watched newer clinical trials, gain FDA approval for use, and many more therapeutic evidence-based interventions enter the pipeline.

Neurology in the 20th century has undergone extraordinary changes, particularly in the past few decades. We trace the major trends, including the growth of the field, the technological advances, and the revolution in neuroscience, the emergence of neurology as a free-standing specialty, the rise of child neurology, and the development of neurological subspecialisation in stroke and neurovascular intervention.

In Pakistan neurology is still underestimated field regarding opting as training in medical field. The ratio between neurologist and patients is extremely disproportionate in Pakistan and it is unfortunately evident even in public sector. The number of trained neurologists is still low. The training facilities are quite limited.

Though structured training program in neurology has been developed over the past few decades in all provinces, but neurology program is still at a stage of infancy as compared to developed countries and struggling to survive in a poor resources.

Although many institutes are offering neurology training in Pakistan, college of physician and surgeon is on the top ranking and many universities are offering MD program in neurology but lacking in structured training.

There are 13 Institutions are offering FCPS II Neurology in Pakistan. So far there are many Neurology training programs in the country like FCPS/MD (adult and paediatric neurology, Neurovascular “stroke”), (6 in Punjab, 5 in Sindh, 2 Baluchistan and 2 in NWFP). For neurovascular (stroke) fellowship Aga Khan University is on top followed by Al-shifa international hospital Islamabad. The 1st FCPS in Neurology was obtained in 1995. Since then 50 candidates have passed the FCPS Examination in Neurology. The quality of trainers/ supervisors s also need to improve, to meet international stranded training requirement. Refresher courses and mini-fellowships of supervisor’s/trainers is a need of hours Neurology has become a vast subject, subspecialty training should be emphasized. Fellowships in stroke and its rehabilitation, paediatrics, movement disorder, epilepsy, neuromuscular disorder, and paediatrics Neurology should be organized. Genetics regarding neurological disorder in particular should receive its due importance as there are many degenerative / metabolic disorders that affects paediatric as well as adult population.

Movement disorder is the most common neurological disorder affecting all age groups. But unfortunately only a few movement disorder specialities are serving in country.

Recent emerging surgical trends in treatment of movement disorders is on rise, such as ablative surgery and deep brain stimulation especially in Parkinson disease is now available in Pakistan. But few tertiary care centres in Pakistan are offering this treatment modality either due to non- availability of trained staff as well as equipment’s. The Quality of life of Parkinson disease patients are improving after surgery but still out of reach for middle and lower class patients due to high cost of treatment. So government and NGOs should put efforts to overcome this hazard. So measured should be taken too focused on equipping Neurologists with the training to tackle this important aspects of Neurology. The stroke training program in the country is lagging behind as compared to rest of the world. While few centres have the facility of thrombolysis, but majority of teaching hospitals do not have this facility. This is particularly alarming situation for health providing officials as stroke is a 2nd leading cause of death worldwide.so at the level of post-graduate residents this situation is causing disappointment as there is no hands-on training experience is

currently available regarding the new interventions in the field of neurology. The development of stroke centres and need for an enhanced, structured Neurology training with super sub specialty programs is mandatory in current situation. Currently the major issues faced by the field of Neurology in Pakistan can be solved through simple restructuring of the training program and offering sponsored stroke fellowship should be offered to doctors so that this facility can be available to patients at door step. Headache is a common neurological disorder prevailing in our society, migraine is disability condition disturbing daily living.

Migraine therapeutics has taken many small steps forward this year. Neuro-stimulation and Monoclonal antibodies for migraine treatment have been in development for a decade and now has FDA approval. But in Pakistan, in spite of high prevalence of migraine and other types of headache, a few headache clinic are running even at tertiary care centres. The availability of trained doctors of this field is lacking. It is difficult for patients to find and be seen by a headache specialist.

It is a responsibility of government and societies like Pakistan headache society to measures in this subspeciality field. The Pakistan Neurological Society or other similar organizations (such as Pakistan Stroke Society, headache and Epilepsy Society etc.) can take the lead for further development of neurology to upraise the standard of training as well as patient care to international level. They are already putting great efforts in such work. Health Ministries, both Federal and Provincial should be approached. Pakistani Neurologists working abroad can be a great resource. Some are willing to invest their time and efforts. They can assist academically as well as financially in term of Scholarship, conduct online teaching courses, workshops / courses can all be sponsored with their help.

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Ahsan Numan; data collection, data analysis, manuscript writing, manuscript review