

Letters to the editor

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Are medical students able to perform multicenter studies?

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Dear editor

Are medical students able to perform multicenter studies? This question goes far beyond what the scientific environment could imagine even a few years ago.

Medical students, particularly in Latin America, have progressively incremented their research productivity[1],[2]. This is due to the strategies developed—such as the creation of medical students' scientific societies—in response to the lack of a culture of research and publishing in the continent [3],[4].

As these improvements have been rising, new research challenging opportunities have emerged. Multicenter studies are an example. We would like to relate the experience of a project we ran in 85 universities of 17 Latin American countries in which the main local researchers were medical students, conforming then the Collaborative Working Group for the Research of Human Resources for Health (Red-LIRHUS) [5]. In order to do so, we will mention the main advantages and complications in carrying out a multicenter study with medical students as investigators.

Advantages:

- Medical students involved were highly motivated to take part in research.
- They seemed to be tremendously easy to team working and always willing to learn.
- Communication was simple and quick due to their frequent use of social networking (Facebook) [5].
- This study offered them the opportunity to learn how to research by researching and motivated them to keep active in this field.

Complications:

- Lack of time due to their academic duties.
- Some of the students had methodological and theoretical deficiencies in research matters.

As an interesting fact, we evaluated the recruited researchers' success in gathering the data and we found that: i) of the initially eight physicians recruited, only six ended the process and one of the unsuccessful physicians was replaced by a medical student who completed the task, and ii) sixty from 77 medical students effectively collected the data. Additionally, the core group of Red-LIRHUS was integrated by three medical students, who were in charge of coordinating the project.

The student-researcher advantages observed and the success in the data-collection process (similar or slightly superior compared to physicians) may be explained by the membership of most of them to their scientific societies, which means that they might be previously motivated in research respects [2],[4].

Red-LIRHUS experience suggests that medical students are capable of meeting the competencies needed in performing a multicenter study and this experience apparently increased their motivation to continue practicing the art of generation of new knowledge.

Notes

Conflicts of Interests

The authors have completed the conflict of interests declaration form from the ICMJE, and declare not having any conflict of interests with the matter dealt herein. Forms can be requested to the responsible author or the editorial direction of the *Journal*.

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