



Editorial

Post graduate otolaryngology education Indian scenario

Introduction:

Number of postgraduate seats in otolaryngology (both diploma and degree) has undergone quantum jump during the past 5 years. The number of seats available has increased 4 times. With increasing privatization of medical education in India more and more private colleges are being started. The number of medical colleges are really mind boggling that the nodal agency responsible for standardization of medical education in India (Medical Council of India) has been found to be wanting in monitoring the standards of medical education in the country. Medical Universities who are responsible for testing the competency of the trained man power in otolaryngology in India actually do not have uniform standards. There are clear cut guidelines regarding the skill sets that should be acquired by a post graduate (diploma and degree) at present.

Standardization why is it important?

Otolaryngology is currently rapidly expanding clinical science. With the advent of endoscopes and modern equipment otolaryngologist is now venturing into erstwhile uncharted territory like advanced skull base surgery, Head and neck oncological surgery etc. Currently prevailing standard in otolaryngological post graduate education is highly variable. There are instances where a post graduate student in otolaryngology has been forced to graduate just after performing a few tonsillectomies. On the other hand there are a few elite institutions which train their post graduate students in advanced otolaryngological surgical procedures. It is high time we start taking notice of the varying standards in post graduate otolaryngological education and correct these anomalies at the earliest lest our future generation will suffer.

How to standardize otolaryngology post graduate education?

This needs to be done by the nodal agency (Medical Council of India). At present it is too focussed on streamlining undergraduate medical education, it has allowed to set in post graduate medical education. Considering the sheer volume of work involved, it is prudent to bifurcate the MCI (One for monitoring undergraduate medical education and the other for monitoring and setting up standards for post graduate medical education). Official syllabi for otolaryngology has not been revised in many medical universities for the past 5 years. The vast difference in the practical skill set between otolaryngologists qualifying from better institutions and not so better ones should be bridged at the earliest. The system is crying out for a change. Drastic change infact.

As a first step the acceptable skill sets for otolaryngological post graduate students should be specified and strictly followed by all Institutions. These skill sets should be publicised and routine inspections should be performed to ensure that the student is provided the opportunity to acquire these skills. Since medicine is not learnt from text books institutions without adequate clinical material should be debarred from conducting post graduate courses. This initial act should be performed without fear or favour. Weeding out these substandard institutions should be the first step if any one is really interested in the future of medical education in this country.

Government should step in and put an end to commercialization of post graduate medical education. They should ensure sufficient post graduate seats are created in government institutions in order to provide competition to commercial medical education.

Role of Universities:

Medical universities should give more weightage to practical skill sets that are absolutely necessary while formulating syllabus for the course. Examination also should include exercises that would test the students pertaining to these non negotiable skill sets. Certain amount of rigidity in this aspect also would be necessary.

Role of Institutions:

Post graduate institutions have a vital role to play in this aspect. They should shun their commercial motives and aim at imparting quality education to the student community. They should be willing to treat patients free of cost as they constitute valuable learning resource to the post graduate student. They should also focus on recruiting fully qualified and competent faculty for training students. These steps will also ensure that they achieve a brand name for themselves in course of time. This is in fact the most difficult aspect to achieve in the current day scenario.

Role of Faculty:

Faculty should ensure that their students are adequately trained in all the skill sets which are necessary. They should spend more time in guiding their students in their academic pursuit. Focus should be on training them on various surgical aspects in the field of otolaryngology. The learning curve is pretty steep and a student should be carefully nurtured and guided during the entire period of study.

Role of MCI:

Being the nodal agency responsible for maintaining standards in medical education it has a vital role to play. It has to maintain constant vigil in maintaining academic standards. It should also ruthlessly weed out substandard institutions. Before granting permission to start new post graduate courses it should carefully and fearlessly evaluate whether the Institution has got the required facilities to train post graduates.

Lets Hope Hope Hope for the best.

Balsubramanian Thiagarajan