

Role of Career Counselling in Medical Profession: Perceptions of Medical Students

Hina Ahmed*, Abdullah Yousaf, Muhammad Ahmed, Muhammad Touqeer Akhtar

Central Park Medical College,
Lahore, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author

Hina Ahmed
hinaahmed74@gmail.com

Received: 14th September, 2023

Revised: 25th October, 2023

Accepted: 2nd November, 2023

DOI 10.51846/jucmd.v3i1.2764



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Abstract

Objective: To determine the perception of medical students regarding the role of career counselling in medical profession.

Methodology: It was a cross sectional study done between April and October 2023, where 140 medical students from Central Park Medical College, Lahore were enrolled via convenience sampling. After receiving formal IRB approval, data was collected via self-designed google forms and WhatsApp groups from MBBS students in their first to final academic year who volunteered to participate after piloting with Cronbach Alpha score of 0.81. After collecting data, SPSS software version 26 was utilized for analysis. The outcomes were presented as frequency tables and bar graphs.

Results: A total of 140 responses were collected with the average age of the respondents being 21±1.7 SD years. About 59 (42.1%) of the students who responded were from 2nd year MBBS, 38 (27.1%) were from 4th year MBBS, 26 (19%) were from 1st year MBBS, 09 (6%) were from 5th year MBBS and remaining 08 (6%) were from 3rd year MBBS. About 60 (42.9%), 52 (37.1%), 133 (95%) and 131 (93.6%) of the students said that career counselling helped identify their capabilities. About 130 (93 %), 115 (82 %), and 113 (81%) gave positive responses when asked about the impact on gaining perspective, developing strategies, and managing conflicts. There was a significant relationship between the role of career counselling in identifying opportunities and building the CV 109 (95%) ($p=0.01$), understanding interest 59 (99%) capabilities 49 (94%) ($p=0.00$), broadening one's perspective 126 (95%), adopting the right strategies 126 (97%) (0.00), and resolving conflicts 108 (95%).

Conclusion: Career counselling should be conducted in the early years of medical professional's career, so that students can identify their areas of interest in order to choose the appropriate specialization in the future.

Keywords: Career Counselling, Career guidance, Career Opportunities, Career Options

Introduction

Career counselling or career assistance is designed to support choosing, changing, or leaving a career and is available at any stage in life.¹ One's career is often one of the most important aspects of adulthood, and embarking on a new job, whether at any stage of life, can be stress ful¹. A career counselor can help by outlining and discussing one's potential career options.² It is a process that focuses on helping one understand oneself and work trends so one can make an informed decision about career and education.²

Like in many other professions, the career counselling concept is gaining acceptable recognition, especially among medical students.²

Students are overwhelmed with excessive academic competition and have no time to explore career options.³ Additionally, current medical school education focuses primarily on essential medical knowledge and skills, with little interest in career choice and student counselling.⁴

Students in the undergraduate medical program study a wide range of medical specialties. Their late exposure to the clinical atmosphere makes their career preferences very late until after graduating from medical school.⁵ Most medical students admitted to various medical colleges in the country don't know what they want to pursue in the future as their specialization.

Careers differ in their demands, requiring different amounts of intellectual ability, manual skill, long-term commitment, or willingness to work environments.⁶ In addition, they can be better suited to personalities, aptitudes, and physical dispositions.⁷ Individuals also differ, having different talents, interests, and abilities. Therefore, career choice involves people considering the entire range of careers and then circumscribing those they regard as broadly acceptable, making their eventual choices within the subset.⁸ Career counselling helps identify the students' inclinations early and guides them to the careers most suitable. Proper counselling will enable medical students to find an appropriate job, providing stability in their thoughts.⁸ Many doctors devote too much time in their initial postgraduate years toward trying to enter a specialty for which they are either not suited or insufficiently endowed with the attributes required.⁸ So, the best thing to do is to provide medical students with career counseling as soon as possible. Appropriate career selection is also crucial as students may drop out from their selected specialties or change their choice after spending a few years of training in a thing not set appropriately. The medical specialty chosen by medical practitioners as a career is an essential factor for the future supply of physicians.⁸ Moreover, it plays a vital role in planning the specialty professionals for the country's healthcare services.⁹ The selection and training for a resident in a specific medical field demand a long time, thorough training, dedicated effort, and a considerable amount of money.¹⁰ It can go to waste as medical

students end up in a field unsuitable for them and unable to work efficiently.

Many students end medical school, unlike other students in other professions, without a clear vision for the future. At graduation, they have acquired the knowledge and clinical skills for becoming competent doctors, but on the other hand, they have progressed very little in knowing about their career choices.¹⁰ Therefore, the rationale of this study was to determine medical students' perception regarding career counselling in the medical profession, which will help establish a foundation for counseling interventions that assist medical students in choosing a suitable major or aligning the direction of their careers. Moreover, the study results will help to advocate for the policymakers of the medical college to establish career counselling cells in each medical institution for student guidance.

Methodology

It was a cross-sectional study in which MBBS students were enrolled from first to final year at Central Park Medical College Lahore. The study was completed in 6 months duration. The sample size was 140 participants using the WHO sample size calculator by keeping the prevalence at 10% from literature review, level of significance 5% and d as the margin of error after piloting with Cronbach Alpha score of 0.81.

After the IRB approval (CPMC/IRB-NO/1365), the data was collected from CPMC medical students from first to final year, through a convenient sampling technique. All medical students in their respective years fulfilling the inclusion criteria of minimum 75% attendance were enrolled in the study after taking written consent. The students were asked about their year of MBBS in which they were enrolled and perception about career counselling in medical profession through a self-designed structured questionnaire which was disseminated to the medical students through WhatsApp group using online google proforma. The response time was one week. Once the data was collected, the compiled excel sheet from online google proforma was transferred to SPSS software version 26 for further analysis. Means and standard deviations were calculated for quantitative variables like age while frequencies of each variable were calculated. Chi square test was applied to determine the relationship between the categorical variables. Data was presented in the form of frequencies tables and bar charts. The level of significance was set at 95% ($p < 0.05$) and the power of the study at 80%.

Results

The data was obtained from a group of 140 individuals pursuing a medical education. The average age of these individuals was calculated to be 21.3 years, with a standard deviation of 1.7 years. Among these students, 59 of them, constituting 42.1% of the total, were enrolled in their second year of the MBBS program. Additionally, 38 students, accounting for 27.1% of the total, were in their fourth year. Furthermore, 26 students, representing 19% of the total, were in their first year. A smaller proportion of students, 9 in total, making up 6% of the total, were in their fifth year. The remaining 8 students, also making up 6% of the total, were in their third year (Figure 1). In relation to their

interests, 60 students, or 42.9% of the total, expressed an interest in career counseling. Similarly, 52 students, accounting for 37.1% of the total, stated that career counseling could aid in the identification of their capabilities. A significantly higher percentage of students, 133 in total or 95% of the total, expressed interest in career counseling. Similarly, 131 students, representing 93.6% of the total, believed that career counseling can be instrumental in identifying their capabilities (Figure 1).

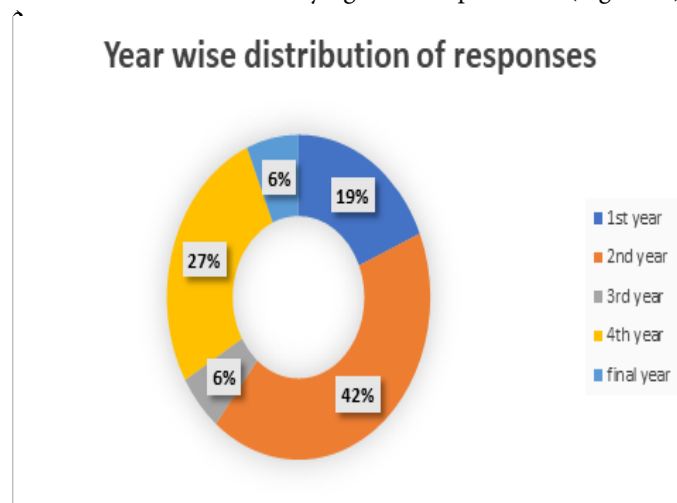


Figure 1: Frequency distribution of responses according to discipline

Out of all respondents, 92%, 93% and 81.4% were of the view that career counselling helped them with career options, finding opportunities and building their CV (Figure 3). Chi-square test of association and fisher's exact test (where required) was used to observe the significant association between opinion of students about help of career counselling in identifying opportunities and different outcome variable. Statistically significant association was observed between opinions about help of career counselling in identifying career opportunities with help in building a resume 109 (81%), helps in understanding interest 59 (99%) and capabilities 49 (94%), broadens the perspective 126 (95%), develop the right strategies 126 (97%), help in resolving conflicts 108(95%) and whether it's a challenge for you or not 50 (85%) ($p < 0.05$) (Table 1).

Career counselling guides Medical students in

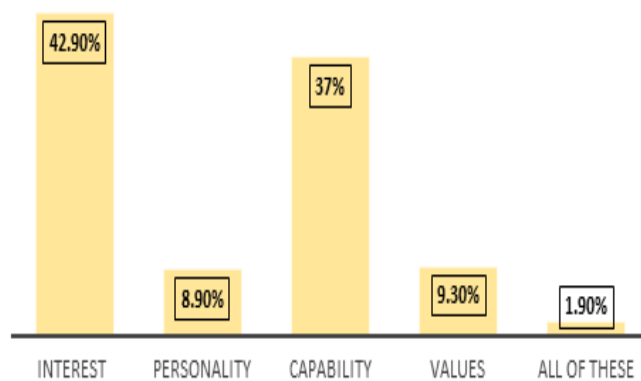


Figure 2: Bar chart of responses about role of career counselling in guiding students

Table 1: Association of opinion about career counselling with outcome factor

Factor	Category	Career counselling helps in identifying opportunities		Total 140 n(%)	p-value
		No n(%)	Yes n(%)		
Building a CV profile	No	06(26)	20(76)	26(18)	0.01*
	Yes	05(4)	109(96)	114(81)	
Helps to understand aspects	Different options	01(100)	00	01(0.7)	0.01*
	Interest	01(1)	59(99)	60(42)	
	Personal-ity	02(16)	10(84)	12(8)	
	Capabili-ties	03(6)	49(94)	52(37)	
	Values	03(23)	10(77)	13(9)	
	All of these	01(50)	01(50)	02(1.4)	
Broadens your per-spective	No	04(57)	03(43)	07(5)	0.01*
	Yes	07(5)	126(95)	133(95)	
Develops the right strategies	No	06(66)	03(44)	09(6)	0.01*
	Yes	05(3)	126(97)	131(93)	
Helps resolve conflicts	No	05(19)	21(81)	26(19)	0.03*
	Yes	06(5)	108(95)	114(81)	
Counsel-ling can be a challenge	No	02(2)	79(98)	81(58)	0.01*
	Yes	09(15)	50(85)	59(42)	
Creates confusion	No	09(9)	91(91)	100(71)	0.73
	Yes	02(5)	38(95)	40(29)	
Creates un-certainty	No	07(6)	96(94)	103(73)	0.32
	Yes	04(10)	33(90)	37(26)	
Uncom-fortable in getting counselling for career choice	No	04(5)	75(95)	79(56)	0.21
	Yes	07(11)	54(89)	61(44)	
Helps in reaching potential employer	No	04(16)	21(84)	25(18)	0.11
	Yes	07(6)	108(94)	115(82)	

*p-<0.00 Statistically Significant

Discussion

According to the findings of the current study, the majority of respondents believed that career counselling assisted them in identifying their interests and capabilities, which was significantly associated with identifying opportunities. A similar study claims and support our results as it fosters self-awareness in individuals based on their values, abilities, and personality types.¹¹ It enables students to make career-related decisions. Furthermore, it assists them in identifying their own strengths and weaknesses.¹¹ Many studies support medical

students' desire to pursue clinical fields such as internal medicine, orthopedics, gynecology and obstetrics, pediatrics, and surgery. These fields already have a large number of trainees and are experiencing a backlog. Only a few students choose to study in other areas and subfields. Financial gains, job opportunities, and early establishment are the most important motivators for choosing a career path as a specialization.¹² The role of career counselling can assist students in choosing a field with room for growth based on their interests and capabilities.¹³

According to the findings of our study, career counselling that assists in identifying opportunities is significantly associated with broadening their perspective. The findings are consistent with the literature, which suggests that career counselling can assist students in exploring various aspects of their future career options that align with their interests and clarifying their path. Effective counselling has been shown to clear confusion.¹⁴ Every aspect of life is changing in this rapidly changing world. Many novel paths are emerging. Students have a plethora of options to choose from. Career counselling can assist in determining a course of action.¹⁵ An undergraduate medical student studies various medical specialties. With more job opportunities and training slots, timely career counselling can increase their interest in a particular field.¹⁶

Our findings also show that deciding on a career path is strongly related to implementing the right strategies. The literature also supports the notion that career counselling, through various educational and professional guidelines, assists students in embracing the proper path to achieve their goals. The timely guidance assists them in identifying potential roadblocks in decision making.¹⁷ It enables students to complete all requirements on time, which reduces anxiety.¹⁸ Further research reveals that every profession is fraught with complexities as it has its own dynamics and standard operating procedures. Clear understanding is the need of today as it clear many job related problems and internal conflicts. They can be corrected with the help of an experienced career counsellor.¹⁹

Furthermore, it aids in planning and future employment. Additional research indicates that proper and timely career counselling assists stakeholders in identifying their objectives based on their interests and personalities.²⁰ In modern times, the aspects of education and employment are dynamically shifting to advancing technologies.²¹ As a result, career paths are changing. When career counselling enlightens the developing mind to choose which is new and has room for growth, a motivating role can be played.²²

Our findings also show that identification of career counselling opportunities are significantly associated with resolution of conflict. According to the literature, effective career counselling assists in dealing with challenges that cause internal conflicts due to confusion.²³ It aids in determining the milestones that must be met.²⁴ It is useful for planning. The most difficult challenge is feasibility.²⁵ Career counselling aids in situational analysis and thus aids in monitoring every future step.²² Peer pressure, family background, social and cultural pressure, finances, and job opportunities are the most significant challenges that students face when deciding on a career.²⁶ Female students face a more challenging situation in Pakistan. They are compelled to

marry during or shortly after finishing medical school. Because they were not exposed to any career counselling during their first years of medical school, they leave the medical profession and do not pursue a specialization.⁸ It is important to emphasize that if such students are guided toward pursuing basic sciences or clinical as a future specializations, they will be productive members of society. When done correctly, career counselling can help reduce obstacles and resolve internal and external conflicts.⁶ Counseling broadens the vision because they have done research in the field of interest.¹⁷

Many fields in the medical profession have stagnated, according to the literature. Most candidates choose a career path that requires a lengthy and tedious induction process.⁴ Furthermore, residents become dissatisfied when they cannot find training positions in accredited institutions around the world.⁵

Finally, it causes young students to be unsure about their career options.¹⁴ Career counselling can assist a student in exploring fields where experts are needed.³ Many new professional medical specializations require human resources. Proper and timely guidance of students in their early years of study in medical colleges can broaden their thinking and help them choose a future career.⁴

According to our findings, the majority of respondents do not feel awkward receiving career counselling. According to the literature, young adults in their early college years are afraid of discussing their future plans and prefer to remain in their own comfort zone.¹⁰ They are hesitant to investigate them in the context of undergraduate education. That's one of the reasons they're hesitant to talk about their jobs.¹¹ It is critical to emphasize that timely intervention, such as career counselling, can help students set future goals. Understanding career options, broadening one's perspective, adopting the appropriate strategies, and resolving conflicts are all significantly related to career counselling in the medical field. Students in the medical field are aware of the benefits and significance of career counselling. They believe that future doctors do need career counselling services because it will not only assist them in choosing a career, but also inform them of opportunities in innovative and underutilized medical fields.

Limitations

The study participant enrolled were from CPMC only due to feasibility issues. It is highly recommended to plan a future study with a larger sample size and other institutions for better comparison.

Conclusion

Career counselling should be conducted in the early years of medical professional's career, so that students can identify their areas of interest in order to choose the appropriate specialization in the future.

Future Implications: The study's findings will help raise consciousness among medical students about the value of career guidance. In order to successfully con-

vey messages aimed at altering behaviour. The current study's findings highlight the importance of providing career counselling to medical students during their academic years so that they can make informed decisions about their future. Students can be encouraged to seek out career counselling and the myths that stand in the way dispelled through the channels of social media, where trustworthy and evidence-based information can be disseminated to the masses. The findings will help inform stakeholders and policymakers at undergraduate medical schools about the importance of providing students with access to career counsellors as soon as possible.

Authors' Contribution: Data collection was performed by HA, while analysis and interpretation of results were carried out by AY. The preparation of the initial manuscript was conducted by MA and MTA. The final version of the manuscript was reviewed and approved by all authors.

Conflict of interest: The authors have no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement: We appreciate the assistance of the CPMC Department of Community Medicine and all of the MBBS students who participated on this study.

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