

Viewpoints

Journal of Nepal Medical Association (JNMA) Elective trainee: Explicating the experiences

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INTRODUCTION

Medical education, in general is theoretical and practical and often confines students to textbooks and hospital environments, leaving a little room for personal growth and exploration [1]. Recognizing this gap, the Journal of Nepal Medical Association (JNMA) introduced concept of elective training in 2006-2007 as a platform to engage medical students in a practical experience through research and publication, communication, leadership, teamwork, priority setting, interpersonal skills along with career orientation to expand their perspective and vision. JNMA is the first medical journal of

Nepal established in 1963 which revolutionized research in medical community [2].

Elective courses extend beyond traditional medical training and offers an opportunity to enrich medical education by fostering personal growth, academic exploration, and career development [3]. This report describes about transformative training experience of my JNMA elective journey which imparted essential skills beyond the medical curriculum. By 2024 more than 18 elective programs have been conducted by JNMA so far [4]. The elective program spanned for one month integrating various workshops, Designing and Conducting Clinical Research (DCCR), scientific publication, adventure activity and other collaborative projects to nurture leadership and competency based medical professionals.

Program Overview:

The training program was organized by JNMA at Nepal Medical Association (NMA) building, Siddhi Sadan, Kathmandu under the guidance of editorial team. Participants were selected through structured process; registration, then screening with final call for interview. The

program was divided into three key components: research and publication, personality development and career orientation primarily targeted to freshly graduate second year medical students, which extended over a period of four weeks. It aimed to provide participants with deeper understanding of research process, leadership skills, interpersonal skills with enhanced problems solving and adaptability skills. The program design was based on problem-based learning (PBL) to ensure that the learning approach was practical and hands-on to transform the bookish knowledge into skills that can be applied in resolving various issues in the real world.

Many studies have shown that medical education often leaves students with limited exposure to broader range of skills due to overwhelming work load, insufficient instruction regarding scientific writing leaving unsatisfactory results in formal research training and writing in undergraduate students [5]. By fostering abilities not typically found in the conventional medical school curriculum, this training fills this requirement.

Program structure:

Total duration: 35 days (29th October 2023-3rd December 2023)

Schedule:

Daily sessions of 10 hours from 10 am to 7 pm, paired with by bi-weekly adventure activity and 4 am challenges. We had to report at JNMA building every day at ten in the morning where the first two and half hours was scheduled for personality development session followed by lunch break of half an hour. Three hours post lunch time was considered as second half, dedicated to

Career orientation. Finally at the last half we had session for research and publication. Electives followed this routine every day except for Monday, Thursday and Saturday. Mondays were for 4 am challenges designed to make most out of morning time and then same routine was followed once the 4 am challenge is over. Similarly, at Thursday, elective had to complete any adventurous activity like Hiking, Rock Climbing, Zip Line, and Bungee Jumping and spend a whole day on these thrilling adventurous tasks. Whereas most of Saturday JNMA used to conduct various scientific writing program were we, elective were volunteers and had to follow different schedule for Saturday. Rest, this training followed same pattern for whole training duration.

Objectives

- a) To enhance knowledge and skills in research and publication.
- b) To develop interpersonal and leadership qualities.
- c) To build teamwork and social networking.
- d) To provide career guidance and mentorship.
- e) To promote physical and mental well-being through extracurricular activities

Learning modules:

1. Research and Publication:

This module mainly focused on teaching electives regarding the research process from literature review to publication. We were trained in literature review, research methodology, critical appraisal and ethical aspects of conducting scientific research. The training focused on how to review a scientific paper, use tools like MESH browser for keywords, checklist like CARE, PRISMA,

STROBE, EQUATOR Network for reporting guidelines for different study types, Mendeley and EndNote for referencing along with structuring a scientific paper.

This is an essential skill for students, but we often lack opportunities to engage with the research process during our formal education, despite knowing its importance in advancing medical knowledge and improving patient outcomes. Mentors also provided valuable insights on what kind of research can be done in different setting, ethics in medical research, and steps for conducting good research. As research itself is very vague, understanding all about research at once was very overwhelming experience for me.

2. Personality Development

A key attention of the program was given to personality development focusing on communication and leadership skill, which is a necessity for physician. This development of interpersonal, adaptability and prioritization skill was nurtured via regular presentations, group discussions, along with proper documentation of everyday works, SMART objectives. Setting the SMART objective for the first time in this elective journey was both exciting as well as challenging. But with proper practice daily it became a manageable routine. We also formulated code of conduct ourselves to maintain discipline within us. Any breach in code of conduct led to harsh punishments, effective for building accountability, and a strong sense of professionalism. We had opportunity to take on the leadership role that boosted self confidence in us helping build proactive mindset. The reflective writings at the end of the day, which was my favorite part were a

good foundation for self-awareness, and critical thinking.

3. Career Orientation

Deciding on a future career path or choosing a career specialty is an important academic decision for medical students [6]. For which, the program also offered extensive career guidance sessions to us shedding light into diverse medical subjects. We got to know about various clinical and non-clinical specialties within medical education. Interaction with senior medical professionals practicing in different countries like USA, UK, India, helped us gain broader understanding of career opportunities beyond our home country, Nepal. We critically evaluated and weighed all the pushing and pulling factors for effective decision making in career that aligns well with our professional aspiration. We spent moderate amount of time into this learning section too.

Key highlights:

With all these rough-tough, either break or bend situation, JNMA elective was very promising and fulfilling experience to me. Apart from major academic focus, this program also encouraged all the participants for good health and sound mental practices. The major highlights of the program were:

Adventure and Recreational activities:

Adventurous activities like bungee jumping, rock climbing, wall climbing, and hiking were enjoyable moments of training. 4 am challenge is considered an early morning dare for the team to reach new destination exactly at 4 am in the morning. This challenge, which seemed impossible at first became the moments of deeply satisfying milestone. After this elective training I have not dared trying this 4 AM challenge again. This was such an

accomplishment for me. These activities instilled the habit of getting up early and making most out of morning time in the trainees.

Saturday events and training: We also got an opportunity to observe various scientific program conducted by JNMA especially on Saturday like JNMA Designing and Conducting Clinical Research, JNMA Hands on Training on Fast Track Publication, beyond Medical School (bMS) and many more. Engaging mainly in managerial part or as an avid observer, we were involved one way or other.

Collaborative learning: Most of the task involved teamwork, group discussions, case presentation, drama, even building a tower or ice breaking session where each and every session encouraged active participation, critical thinking which facilitated the exchange of ideas and diverse perspective. Daily discussions and presentations helped to overcome stage fear and improved verbal communication skills.

NMA National Health Summit (NHS) - 3rd Edition: The major event during our training was 3rd NMA NHS. Apart from volunteering in this program, trainees also witnessed the expert panel discussion, poster presentation, workshops regarding the health tools. Similarly, this program also became a learning experience for me as I could understand and comprehend how the nationwide programs are conducted, what should be done pre-program, during program and post-program in order to run program smoothly. I consider myself lucky enough to observe this grand event, from the perspective of both organizer as well as an observer.

Social work: During the elective month, there was once in a while a golden opportunity to engage in social and humanitarian work taking a break from our routine. We distributed some basic school supplies like copies, pencil, eraser, color pencils, sketch book to children in one of the ashrams in Kathmandu. Seeing the joy and happiness in them was such a humbling moment for me as how such simple items, often taken for granted could bring wave of happiness and creativity in the face of others. This experience reminded me that even though medicine addresses physical illness, social and humanitarian work heal in ways beyond imaginable.

Personal Reflection: This training equipped me with interpersonal skills and qualities that are good for professional and personal growth. It refined my research and academic writing, communication and public speaking, leadership and teamwork. I also got an opportunity to learn about different career path and could picturize clearer idea of what could be better for me. Furthermore, this elective journey polished discipline, resilience and adaptability so that one could handle challenges better. It has imparted a sense of self confidence towards balancing and merging professional goals with personal well-being.

CONCLUSION

The JNMA elective provided a platform for medical student like me to hone my professional skills beyond the medical curriculum. Exposure to research, leadership and career planning enriched the academic experience to develop a competent healthcare professional. Such initiative like elective training bridge the gap between traditional

medical educations and broadens the skills required to succeed in the health sector.

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