



Medicine as a career choice: motivating factors in Nepalese medical students

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ABSTRACT

This study was done to investigate the reasons which motivated Nepalese students to choose medicine. The majority of students chose medicine because of their interest in medicine and dedication for service to sick people. A desire for monetary gain and family pressure motivated a few students to choose the medical course. Other motivating factors included social prestige and better employment prospectus.

Keywords: Career choice; education; medical; undergraduate; attitude.

INTRODUCTION

Medical course is the most sought of after all professional courses in the Indian subcontinent. However, there are only two medical schools run by His Majesty's Government of Nepal. This has led to an exodus of the cream of science students to the neighbouring countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and as far as Russia. Recently, five private medical schools have been established to meet this demand.

Entering medicine is a complex personal decision influenced by a multitude of

extrinsic and intrinsic factors. The medical course is tedious, time consuming, demanding, stressful, with excessive workload, lack of leisure time and lengthy period of qualification. In spite of those deterring factors a very large number of students compete for a few available seats.

Though numerous studies of medical career choices have been conducted in various countries (Karalliedde *et al* 1986; Kruijthof *et al* 1992; Redman *et al* 1994; Razali 1996), no such studies have been conducted in this country till now.

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METHODS

The study was conducted among the first, second and third-year medical students of BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences, Dharan, Nepal admitted in the year of 1996, 1997 and 1998. One hundred and ten students participated in this study. A questionnaire was filled in, consisting of both open ended and closed questions relating to the following factors, which might have influenced them to choose medicine as a career.

1. Doctor in the family/relation
2. Books/films
3. Illness of self/family
4. Personal choice
5. Social pressure
6. Family pressure
7. Increased possibility of self-employment
8. Good employment prospectus
9. Social prestige
10. Opportunity to serve the sick
11. Age at which the participant decided to become a doctor
12. Whether he/she had obtained admission to any other course.

The questionnaire was distributed to the students as soon as they entered the medical school. The responses were tabulated and analyzed.

RESULTS

Of the 110 students, who participated in the study, 89 (80%) were males and 21 (20%) were females. Twenty seven (24%) students have doctors in their family. Of these, 6 students' father and one student's mother were doctors.

One hundred three (93%) students chose medicine because of their interest in medicine while 15 (73%) chose because of family pressure and 4 (13%) because of social pressure (Table I).

Table I: Motivating factors

| Rank | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|--------------------|-----|----|----|
| 1. Personal choice | 103 | 4 | 3 |
| 2. Family Pressure | 15 | 59 | 36 |
| 3. Social Pressure | 4 | 27 | 79 |

Rank 1 - most important Rank 2 - least important

Eighty-one (73%) students chose medicine because they wanted to provide service to the sick while 41 (37%) students wanted career in a respected profession (social prestige) and 22 (20%) students thought that by choosing this career they can become self-dependent and do not have to search for an employment. Nineteen (17%) students were motivated to choose this career because of good employment prospectus (Table II).

Table I: Motivating factors

| Rank | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-----------------------------------|----|----|----|----|
| 1. Service to sick | 81 | 19 | 6 | 4 |
| 2. Social Prestige | 41 | 37 | 13 | 19 |
| 3. Possibility of self employment | 28 | 14 | 27 | 41 |
| 4. Good employment prospectus | 25 | 19 | 31 | 35 |

Rank 1 - most important Rank 4 - least important

Eighty (73%) students decided to become doctors between 12-16 years of age while 10 students decided (to become) doctors as early as 6-9 years of age. This shows the intrinsic motivation.

Sixteen students were influenced by books and 14 by various films. 8 students were influenced by self illness and 26 by family influence.

Thirty-six (33%) students had got admission in other courses like science (17), engineering (10), environmental science (3), microbiology (2), medical laboratory technology (1) and business administration (3). But they left those courses and joined medical school.

DISCUSSION

Like any other Asian countries, the students entered this medical school after completion of +2/I.Sc. course. The majority (73%) of the students decided to become doctors between 12-16 years of age while a few (10 students) wanted to become doctors as early as 6-9 years of age. This shows that the students were interested to do medicine from their early childhood.

From this study it appeared that the interest in medicine and service to the sick are the two main reasons for choosing medicine as a career. These findings were identical to the findings of Razali SM, 1996 in Malaysian students. There is an acute shortage of doctors in this country with a doctor population ratio of 1:62000. Most

of the population in this country do not get even the primary health care and die prematurely. The lack of doctors to provide medical service to the society motivated many students to choose this profession as a career. The pathetic health status of the rural population motivated many students to choose this profession in order to improve the health status of the society.

Many students have mentioned the impact of the common man's suffering for the want of basic medical service which motivated them to do something for these patients. This desire has been further strengthened by the fact that doctors & medical facilities available in the country are being utilised only by those who can afford it while the poor patients left to seek the help of faith healers.

In the developing countries like Nepal, medical profession is considered to be a highly prestigious profession and the doctors get the highest respect in the society. In this country the doctors are considered as next to god. Keeping this high social status and respect in mind 37% students chose this profession.

Family pressure also played a major role in choosing the profession. The family achieves high social status and also a monetary gain when a member of the family becomes a doctor. Thus, 11% students chose medicine to satisfy their parents' expectation.

Because of an acute shortage of doctors in this country, doctors have good

employment prospectus and do not have to struggle for a job.

The employment prospects of a doctor in the neighbouring countries is entirely reverse. They really have to struggle to get a job. 48% students chose medicine because of good employment prospectus and possibility of self employment.

As discussed earlier, medicine is the most of sought of after all professional courses in the Indian subcontinent. 33% students had got admission in other courses but left those courses and joined medicine. This again shows the dedication of our students to medical profession.

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