



Letter to Editor

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Why is government funded dental research so scarce in India?

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Sir,

We read the "Compendium of ICMR research papers (1919-2010) – A consolidation" released by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in the year 2011 [1]. The ICMR team (Division of Publication and Information) has done a commendable job in compiling such a comprehensive and exhaustive database containing 12471 articles (intramural research) from 1919 to 2010. The compendium gives an insight into various priority research areas of the ICMR from time to time. However, it was astonishing and distressing at the same time to find that the dental research has been given little priority, which is evident from the paucity of ICMR published research papers in the field of dentistry [1].

We made a specific search for dental papers in the compendium. The search was performed with the most commonly used terms in dentistry, such as oral, dental, mouth, caries, periodontal, saliva, gums, gingiva and teeth. Out of the first set of results, the articles not related directly to dentistry were excluded. Of 12471 articles, only 17 were related to dental research, which accounted for just 0.13% of research work carried out by the ICMR through intramural research over a period of approximately nine decades.

ICMR is the leading funding agency for biomedical research in India, with twenty-one permanent institutes, six regional centres and five research units [2]. Centres dedicated exclusively to research on various health problems faced by Indian population such as leprosy, tuberculosis, nutrition etc. have been established. But till date, no initiative has been undertaken to establish infrastructure to facilitate dental research in India. In contrast, in the United States of America, the National Institute of Health (NIH) includes 27 Institutes and Centers, each with a specific research agenda [3]. Of these centres, the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR), established in 1948 leads in funding research on dental, oral and cranio-facial health [3]. NIDCR provided funds to Centers for Research to Reduce Disparity in Oral Health (2008), to reduce the unequal burden of oral disease suffered by different population segments such as poor or people with special needs. NIDCR also established the National Dental Practice-Based Research Network in April 2012, with headquarters at School of Dentistry, Alabama University, Birmingham. This national administrative body leads and supervises 6 other smaller regional research sites [4].

Illiteracy, poverty and lack of awareness are some factors responsible for the neglect of dental health in India, which is a definite risk for increased incidence of oral diseases. Compounded with these factors, is the lack of impetus given to dental research in India. Surprisingly, one-third of dental schools in the world are in India, but our contribution to dental research is not even one percent.[5]The importance of dental health and research is low in the Indian scenario. Therefore, this is a humble appeal to the concerned authorities to take initiative towards development of infrastructure for dental research so as to help India catch up with the global standards of oral health and research.

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