Since the last few decades there has been a growing concern about improving the medical education all over the world. This has further been intensified by the minimum standards of quality set by International accrediting bodies such as World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) and the General Medical Council (GMC). The public expectations for healthcare professional are also increasing due to increase in public awareness regarding the diagnostic and therapeutic facilities available internationally. Furthermore, government policies and legislations now increasingly focus on the rights of the patients and on the accountability of the medical doctors and expect medical schools to modify their curricula in light of the modern day requirements.

In 2008, the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council issued an official notice declaring the establishment of a department of Medical Education in every undergraduate medical college mandatory for accreditation by Pakistan Medical and Dental College (PMDC). All these, along with the need to incorporate ever changing Medical Developments, newer Educational strategies, and new assessment tools into the curriculum and the demand to train more doctors within existing resources have necessitated the development of a department of medical education (DME) in medical schools throughout the world. Following the trend, medical schools all over Pakistan are developing or are trying to develop medical education departments. The objective of this article is to provide an initial guideline in the local context to help those in the process of developing such department.

The medical education department has a wide scope and encompasses all aspects of undergraduate and postgraduate student training including curriculum development and its implementation. It is also responsible for professional and career development of the faculty. Moreover it is expected to play an important role in facilitating research in the institute. The department of medical education can also assist the institute in evaluation programs of quality assurance and thereby help the institute in acquiring accreditation form national and international accrediting bodies.

Presently, the medical education units in some medical schools are run by a single part time faculty member, who has other responsibilities in his/her parent department. Whereas, some departments have full time, dedicated, qualified medical educationists who are assisted by part time faculty members. The decision depends on the vision and priorities of the institute. The following recommendations are being made for a fully functional and vibrant medical education department.

+ One or two qualified medical educationist must be present as permanent members of the medical education department.
+ Senior faculty members from different department who are well versed in medical education may play their role as part time members of the medical education department helping in curriculum development, implementation and assessment.
+ Educational technologists can play an important role in staff development, research, management and technical support.
+ Technical support staff such as computer operators and other IT personals can assist the faculty in preparing computer based on line teaching materials.
+ Two to three person of different responsibilities to act as secretarial and administrative support staff are essential for smooth running of the department.

Regarding Infrastructure, it is recommended that the department should have an independent identity, as appropriate space and offices are necessary for smooth functioning. In a fully functional and active department separate offices are recommended for academic head (director medical education), research head, and secretarial/administrative staff. Moreover, seminar rooms for teaching and academic meetings; computer and print room for preparation of teaching material for students; assessment cell with secrecy room and skills lab should also be a part of the department. Multiple models are available regarding the actual positioning of the medical education department. The medical education department may be an extension of the dean's office or it may be a separate entity like other departments in the medical college.

The finances for the establishment of the medical education department may be provided by a funding agency, the university or the medical school itself. It is suggested that the medical college or the university should provide the basic space, equipment and minimal essential staff for the initial running of the department.

It is recommended that the department should be headed by the director medical education assisted by an assistant director both of which are specialist in the field of medical education. The director does not necessarily have to be a medical doctor but he must have leadership qualities and the vision to form a bridge between the current and future state. There is no place for a director who is egotistic, overcritical, or harsh under pressure. It is suggested that the director should report directly to the dean. This is beneficial as it will help to provide administrative support.

Depending on the activities, the medical education department may have multiple sections within it. There may be a separate section for teaching, research and evaluation each headed by a separate assistant/associate director. Similarly there could be
separate individuals looking after different programs. The above mentioned approaches are mere guideline and the extent of the department, the human resources, the infrastructure and the involved finances may vary in different contexts depending on the vision of the institute and the sentiments of the faculty. However, developing a medical education department is necessary for every medical school which intends to keep pace with the rapidly changing requirements of the medical practitioner. It is important to mention here, that the medical education department should not be only symbolic, but should act as a partner in curriculum development and implementation and should have equal status to its sister departments in the institute.

REFERENCES