

Applying for recognition status: Experience of the undergraduate medical education accreditation in Iran

Sir,

Increasing numbers of medical schools in developing countries are considering applying for global recognition to assure local accreditation organizations of the quality of their undergraduate medical education programs. However, the process of developing and implementing quality assurance systems required for global recognition can appear to be daunting. Our recent experience in Iran has highlighted that the implementation process of Recognition Status can have many benefits in addition to achieving successful recognition.

The Secretariat of the Council for Undergraduate Medical Education (SCUME), a national body responsible for quality assurance of programs in Iran, applied for World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) Recognition Status in November 2017.^[1] When its eligibility was confirmed, the recognition checklist was completed describing SCUME accreditation activities. After approval, a WFME team observed the SCUME visit of one medical school and monitored one decision-making meeting by the accreditation committee. SCUME received the approved recognition status and high quality feedback from WFME in June 2019.

The SCUME obtained several benefits from implementing the WFME recognition assessment process. After the WFME visit, SCUME sent an evaluation questionnaire to people who had experienced the visit. There was high satisfaction with the recognition experience and respondents strongly agreed that it improved the process of decision-making and site visiting. They mentioned that the success of this experience would reassure all stakeholders about the SCUME processes as the most appropriate accreditation practice in the country.

After approval of SCUME by WFME, accreditation activities accelerated. During the year after the recognition assessment, 61 medical school visits were conducted and 51 accreditation decisions were made compared with only ten site visits per year previously.^[2] There has also been an increased commitment to maintain and promote the quality of accreditation activities. For example, there have been a variety of development programs to train

medical school staff and site visitors in accreditation standards and procedures. The members of the SCUME accreditation committee were committed to follow the same procedures as when visited by WFME team, despite the increased workload required for accreditation.

The success of this first experience of external assessment has encouraged other professional organizations in the country, including the Secretariat of the Council for Pharmaceutical and Specialized Education and the Secretariat of the Council for Biomedical Science Education, to initiate similar accreditation processes. From our experience, we consider that other developing countries would benefit from implementing accreditation systems by applying for recognition assessment programs such as that by WFME. Policymakers would also take the advantages of external assessment for convincing the key stakeholders and reinforcing the new policies or interventions in health professions education.

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There are no conflicts of interest.

**Roghayeh Gandomkar, Azim Mirzazadeh¹,
Nikoo Yamani², Zahra Sadat Tabatabaei,
Abtin Heidarzadeh³, John Sanders⁴**

Department of Medical Education, School of Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran, ¹Department of Internal Medicine, School of Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran, ²Department of Medical Education, Medical Education Research Center, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran, ³Medical Education Research Center, Education Development Center, Guilan University of Medical Sciences, Rasht, Iran, ⁴Department of Medical Education, Edge Hill University Medical School, Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, UK

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Roghayeh Gandomkar,
Department of Medical Education, School of Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, No. 57, Hojjatdust Alley, Naderi Street, Keshavarz Blvd, Tehran, Iran.
E-mail: rgandomkar@tums.ac.ir

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