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REVIEW ARTICLE

Declining Interest in a Career in Medicine: Exploring Multifaceted Factors

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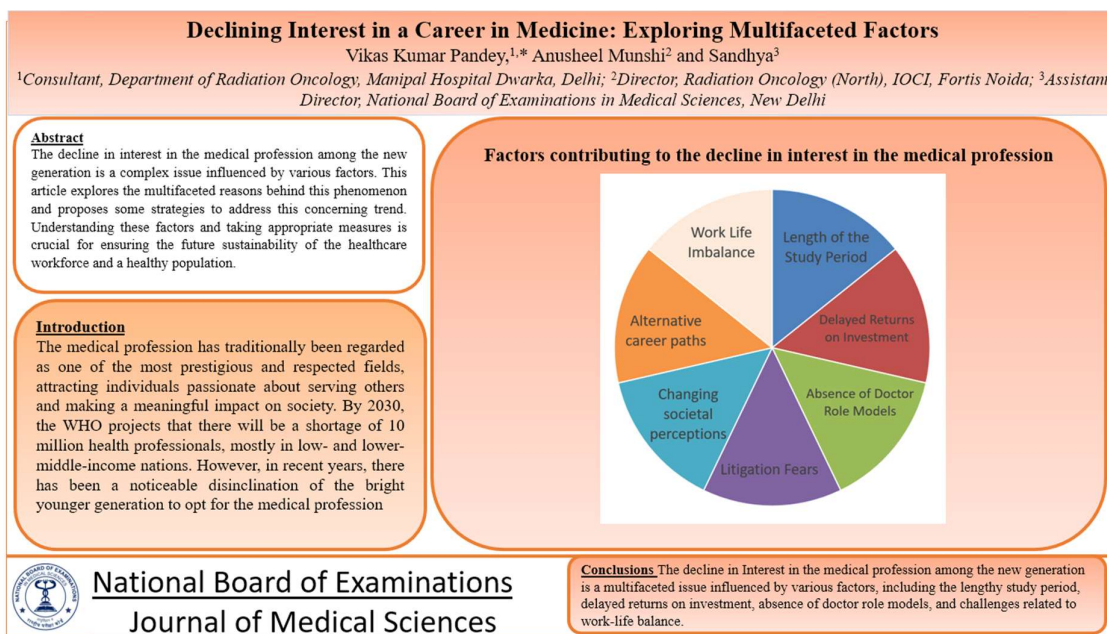
Abstract

The decline in interest in the medical profession among the new generation is a complex issue influenced by various factors. This article explores the multifaceted reasons behind this phenomenon and proposes some strategies to address this concerning trend. Understanding these factors and taking appropriate measures is crucial for ensuring the future sustainability of the healthcare workforce and a healthy population.

Keywords: Declining interest in medicine, medical education challenges, work-life balance in healthcare, financial burden of medical training, healthcare workforce sustainability

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Graphical Abstract



Introduction

The medical profession has traditionally been regarded as one of the most prestigious and respected fields, attracting individuals passionate about serving others and making a meaningful impact on society [1]. By 2030, the WHO projects that there will be a shortage of 10 million health professionals, mostly in low- and lower-middle-income nations [2]. However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable disinclination of the bright younger generation to opt for the medical profession [3]. The rising number of unfilled spots in both undergraduate med schools and postgraduate residency programs is concerning, as evidenced by a 4.7% decline in med school applicants in the United States and an increase in the number of vacant seats in med schools in India from 197 in 2021-22 to 202 in 2022-23 [4,5,6]. This decline in the quality and quantity of medical personnel poses significant challenges to the future sustainability of healthcare and has

significant implications for the quality of patient care. In this research paper, we examine the various factors contributing to the decline in Interest in the medical profession among the new generation (Figure 1).

Length of the Study Period

One of the primary factors contributing to the decline in interest in the medical profession among generations is the long study period required to become a qualified doctor. Medical education typically involves extensive undergraduate studies, followed by several years of medical school and residency training [7]. This prolonged duration can deter individuals from seeking faster career paths or hesitating to such a demanding educational journey. GenZ and Gen Alpha typically want quick outcomes and results for their efforts, something a step-wise medical study curriculum needs to offer. The average length of medical training has certainly contributed to a decline in medical school applicants [8].



Figure 1. Factors contributing to the decline in interest in the medical profession

Delayed Returns on Investment

The present-day world is getting more and more materialistic. Delayed returns on investment are another significant factor contributing to the decline in Interest in the medical profession. Medical education incurs substantial financial costs, including tuition, living expenses, and educational materials. Additionally, the prolonged duration of medical training means that aspiring doctors spend several years incurring debt without the opportunity to earn a stable income. A study published in the Journal of American College found that medical graduates often face significant financial burdens, with many experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety related to student loan debt [9]. The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC)

reports that the typical four-year cost of attendance is from \$255,000 to \$337,000 [10]. A 2018 LANCET research found that the expense of training doctors in India more than quadrupled, from USD 35,000 in 2008 to USD 70,000 (about 60 lakhs in Indian rupees) [11]. The prospect of delayed financial stability can dissuade individuals from pursuing a career in medicine, especially when alternative professions offer quicker returns on investment.

Absence of Doctor Role Models

The present generation is more impressionable than ever and needs role models. Whether it is the traditional media or the hugely popular social media, sportspersons, movie stars, business people, and entrepreneurs are hailed as

stars, their success stories splashed all over and were most talked about. Only an odd corner talks about a medical achievement, with minimal glorification of the concerned doctor. This is certainly a quantum fall from some years ago when doctors and the medical profession were high. A study of Norwegian registry data indicated that only 8% of medical students had parents who were doctors. [12]. This decline in familial exposure to the medical profession is concerning, signifying that doctors are not running in families anymore. It also means that many young individuals are not very impressed by the rewards and challenges of a medical career, even with a doctor as a parent.

Challenges Related to Work-Life Balance

The demanding nature of a medical career, characterized by long hours, high-stress levels, demanding commitment, and limited work-life balance, is another deterrent for the new generation [13]. Present day generation hears and talks about prioritizing a healthy work-life balance and seeks professions that offer flexibility and autonomy. However, the hierarchical structure of the medical profession, coupled with the pressure to excel academically and professionally, too many administrative tasks, and insufficient salary can impede work-life balance and contribute to burnout among healthcare professionals [14]. The lack of work-life balance in the medical profession and the growing violence against doctors can dissuade individuals, especially those prioritizing family and personal life, from pursuing a career in medicine [15].

Litigation Fears

Of late, medical science has become infamous for litigation [16]. This trend, which started in the West, has rapidly gained traction across the world. Unsatisfied patients or families can easily approach courts and forums regarding any incidence of possible deficiency in care. This, unfortunately, is the only aspect of medical care that gets maximum media coverage in the present times. Comparatively, there is a much lesser litigation threat for professions such as business, engineering, aviation-chartered accountants, etc. Further, in many cases, doctors are at the receiving end of violence, which is an even more worrisome trend [17,18].

Other Contributing Factors

Peer pressure for quick success, significant ethical issues in medical research, funding challenges in medical research and pharma industry as the new drivers of medicare.

It has been noted that a significant number of students in India exhibit a preference for pursuing a profession in medicine due to the influence exerted by their parents, resulting in a lack of intrinsic desire [19]. Upon successfully passing the admission test, individuals must attend a demanding five-year training program at a medical school, followed by a one-year internship, before obtaining their degree. The current inclination towards specialization has resulted in an extended duration of the study term. The selection of medicine as a professional path is a complex choice, and not all intellectually gifted individuals may pursue a career in medicine. The student population exhibits a diverse array of familial backgrounds [20]. After all this the doctors are put in peer

pressure for quick success compared to their counterparts.

The allure of medicine is fading, shadowed by ethical dilemmas and financial constraints. The once-revered field faces a decline in interest, with aspiring professionals deterred by the profound ethical issues in medical research [21]. Moreover, funding challenges plague the industry, hampering innovation and discouraging potential recruits. The

pharmaceutical industry's influence looms large, shaping healthcare agendas and priorities [22].

Strategies for path correction

Addressing the decline in Interest in the medical profession among the new generation requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the various factors contributing to this trend. Some potential strategies are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Strategies for path correction

Addressing the problem	
Increasing the visibility of doctor role models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting mentorship programs • Outreach initiatives • Public awareness campaigns • Showcasing diverse experiences and contributions of doctors
Improving work-life balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing progressive policies and practices within healthcare organizations • Promoting work-life balance • Flexible scheduling of work/ telemedicine options • Support programs for physician wellness. We are increasing the number of postgraduate seats.
Enhancing financial incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial incentives • Loan forgiveness programs • Scholarships and competitive salaries

Conclusion

The decline in Interest in the medical profession among the new generation is a multifaceted issue influenced by various factors, including the lengthy study period, delayed returns on investment, absence of doctor role models,

and challenges related to work-life balance. Addressing this trend requires collaborative efforts from stakeholders across the healthcare industry, including educational institutions, healthcare organizations, policymakers, and professional associations. By implementing targeted

strategies to address the root causes of the decline in Interest in medicine, we can inspire the next generation to pursue careers in healthcare and ensure the future sustainability of the healthcare workforce.

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization: VKP and AM;
Data Curation: VKP and AM;
Methodology/formal analysis/validation: VKP, AM and SR. Project administration: VKP, AM and SR.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they do not have conflict of interest.

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