

Title: Expectations of Indian Applicants from an Educational Fellowship

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The context and setting: The Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research (FAIMER) is a non-profit US-based organization which also conducts Fellowship programs in South Asia, South Africa and Latin America. The Fellowship programs target medical educators who have the potential to improve education in their schools and the curriculum emphasizes educational methods, educational leadership, management and development of a community of educators. FAIMER has run three regional institutes in India since 2005 at Mumbai, Ludhiana and Coimbatore. Each year 16-20 applicants are selected at each institute.

Why the idea was necessary: When an educational program is transported from one country to another, it is important to know whether the local needs and wants are being catered to. The study was conducted to see if the expectations of Indian applicants from the Fellowship program matched the objectives of the program.

What was done: While applying for the FAIMER Regional Institute Fellowship program in India, applicants were asked why they were applying for the Fellowship. Answers to this question from 55 applicants selected for the 2009 Fellowship program at the three regional institutes were analyzed. Coding was performed by one researcher and the codes were verified and validated by another until a consensus was arrived at. In addition, focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted at the end of Year 1 of the Fellowship to further elicit their viewpoints.

Evaluation of results: The major themes which emerged were desire to acquire knowledge or skills from specific areas, desire to bring about a specific change or make a difference, career advancement, need to network, previous experience in medical education and previous awareness of the Fellowship program. Responding to the question, applicants most frequently described their need to acquire specific knowledge (43.6%) and pedagogical skills to become effective teachers (78%) and good trainers of medical teachers (38%). They specifically wanted to learn about educational methods, assessment, curriculum design, communication skills, mentoring, educational research and scientific research methodology. They also wrote about their desire to bring about specific curricular innovations (40%), improve the health system in their country (38%), strengthen their medical education units (25.5%) and improve the quality of teaching imparted by their institutes (25.4%). They articulated their need to network with international and national medical educationists (31%), and their desire to acquire a formal degree in medical education or some form of recognition (20%). They also described the influence of past exposure or experiences in medical education (38.2%) and awareness of the quality of the FAIMER program (10.9%) and the impressive quality of their faculty (12.7%) from colleagues.

Fellows also wrote about the topics they expected the Fellowship Program would cover. Interestingly a large majority of Fellows expected the curriculum to contain topics related to teaching-learning methods (51%) and assessment (26%) rather than leadership (10%) or management topics (7%). Responses from the FGD showed that awareness of leadership and management components was low earlier and appreciation of the importance of these topics increased after they were enrolled in the Fellowship program.