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Are Health Agencies Designated as Research Centers in Nepal Conducting Adequate Researches ?

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ABSTRACT

Background: In Nepal, promoting quality research and enhancing research capacity is being accomplished through Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC). It also plays an authorized body to regulate, monitor and coordinate health research centers by maintaining the highest level of ethical standards. The aim of this study is to explore situation of health agencies designated as research center in Nepal.

Methods: A cross sectional descriptive study design was used to carry out monitoring and follow up of activities of research centre of all seven provinces of Nepal that had title "Research" in their title name from January 2018 to July 2018.

Results: There were only 81 research centers in Nepal and more than half (55 percent) of these have been found in Kathmandu valley, Province 3. Research found that 82.3% so called research centers were just health service provider and 10% of research institute were research based and just 5% have the core objectives of research. Likewise, 30% of research institute were actually involved in health related researches whereas large proportion (70%) of research institute were not involved in any kind of research work. Surprisingly, only 37.5% have taken ethical approval to conduct the designated research.

Conclusions: Only one tenth of the research centers have mentioned research as their core business. However, less than one third of such centers were involved in health research, and out of which, only 28 percent took ethical permission. Most of the research organizations want to conduct research but they do not have required research skills and competent manpower to carry out research.

Keywords: Health research centers; monitoring; Nepal.

INTRODUCTION

Globally health and economic development are advancing rapidly with high-quality health care, by the energetic efforts of many health professionals conducting research.^{1,2} Research generates knowledge through systematic investigations and improves the functioning of the health system so that decisions can be based on evidence.³ Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) is a national apical body for promoting health research in Nepal.⁴ NHRC coordinates with the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), non-government agencies, private sectors and other relevant ministries to contribute to policy development and health care services.⁵ MOHP has provisioned that "Research Center" titled organizations should conduct at least two researches per year with ethical approval from the Ethical Review Board at NHRC or Institutional Review Committees (IRCs) at different

institutions.^{4,6} However, several organization/center/polyclinic/institute/hospitals have been deliberately adding a research tag to compete with other agencies, and for business strategy.^{4,6,7} The aim of this study is to explore situation of health agencies designated as research center in Nepal.

METHODS

The cross-sectional descriptive study design was used to carry out monitoring and follow up of activities in all Medical/Health Agencies of all seven provinces of Nepal that had "Research" in their title name during the time of January 2018 to July 2018. The list of Medical/Health Agencies was gathered from Company Registrar Office, Kathmandu Nepal to collect relevant information of medical/health agencies (Hospitals, Polyclinics, etc.) with the purpose of finding the functionality

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of medical/health agencies. The responsible persons of centers were contacted and their informed consent was taken for collecting the information. The semi-structured questionnaire was used. The data were entered into Epi Data 3.2 with pre-set jump command. Data cleaning and editing were done subsequently after entry and descriptive statistical analysis (frequency and percentage) and cross tabulation were done using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 17.0.

RESULTS

Table 1. Research centers in different States (n=81).

States	Frequency	Percent
1	7	8.6
2	10	12.3
3	45	55.6
Gandaki	12	14.8
5	4	4.9
Sudur Paschim	3	3.7
Total	81	100.0

The study shows that more than half 45(56%) of research centers are located at province No.3, whereas in province No.5 and Province Sudur Paschim the availability of researcher center is below five percentages (Table 1).

Table 2. District-wise distribution of research centers (n=81).

Districts	Frequency	Percent
Baglung	1	1.2
Banke	2	2.5
Dhanusha	4	4.9
Jhapa	5	6.2
Kailali	3	3.7
Kaski	10	12.3
Kathmandu, lalitpur and Bhaktapur	45	55.6
Parsa	5	6.2
Rupandehi	3	3.7
Sarlahi	1	1.2
Sunsari	2	2.5
Total	81	100.0

Among all scattered research centers, it was found that more than half 45(56%) research centers are at Kathmandu valley, followed by Kaski (12.2%), Parsa (6.2%) and Jhapa (6.2%)(Table 2).

The study reveals that overwhelmed 70(86.4%) of research center provided informed consent before research and 11(13.6%) did not provided consent for study/information.

The majority 58(83%) of the health facility/hospital/nursing home was conducting research followed by 2(3%) NGOs and 10(14%) Ayurveda research center, diagnostic center, institute, laboratory, pharmacy, polyclinic, sports clinic and research center.

Table 3. Core business (n=79).

Core business (Multiple response)	Frequency	Percent
Providing health service	65	82.3
Teaching	4	5.1
Research	8	10.1
Laboratory	2	2.5

Among the total surveyed research center, research base institute were health services providers 65(82.3%). Similarly, one in ten institutes 8(10%) were research-based, whereas 4(5%) of institutes having core objectives were to research (Table 3).

Table 4. Involvement in health research (n=70).

Health research involvement	Frequency	Percent
Yes	21	30.0
No	49	70.0

Only 20(30%) of the research institution were actually involving in research and rest 49(70%) of the research institution were not involved in any research activity(Table 4).

Table 5. Taken ethical approval (n=21).

Ethical approval taken	Frequency	Percent
Yes	6	28.57
No	15	71.43

The study reveals that almost majority 15(71%) of the research center were not taking and ethical approval for conducting a research(Table 5).

DISCUSSION

Study identified 370 research centers in Nepal from the information provided by the Office of Company Registrar, Tripureswor, Kathmandu (As per law, every private an institution must register their firm before operating any kind of business in OCR.). Tracking a research center is the biggest challenges in Nepal. Only 81 research

centers were found during the field visit. It indicates the awareness of researchers toward the importance of word “research center” and the research conducting practices is not in their priority.

It was found that among the research centers who had done the research, only 28.57 % of them had taken ethical approval before conducting research. It indicates a culture of conduction of health research after getting ethical approval from ERB or IRC is negligible. NHRC states the time of approval of proposals was found to be shortened and the research study is to be gradually increasing⁷. But a large number of research centers were out of track. So, making proper collaboration and coordination is essential. Many reasons for not conducting any research is, negligence on the research word, planning to do research shortly, no idea about the research, recently established, no fully developed infrastructure, lack of skilled manpower, no more monitoring and supervision from concerned authorities.⁸

The organizations whose core objectives are to provide health services are more active in research rather than research organization itself and the majority of the research center are in the Kathmandu valley. This shows the inequality of research study and the medical doctor dominancy is still prevailing in Nepal. Furthermore, most of the research organizations want to conduct research but they do not have adequate funds, skills and resources to carry out research. This shows the gap between the NHRC and research center.

Among surveyed research institute more than one third 24(36%) of research institute expect research methodical training from NHRC followed by technical support 20(30%) for technical service support, 15(23%) seeks statistical help for data analysis and management. The others help includes providing fund/research grant for conducting research work, sharing of health-related information, conduct monitoring and supervision of their projects.

CONCLUSIONS

During Monitoring of those centers, we found that only 81 research centers were functional (according to the rule, all private health institutions must register and renew the license every year. For up to 25-bedded hospitals, registration and renewal of registration needs to be obtained from their respective Districts Public Health/Hospitals Offices. For 25 to 50 bedded hospitals, registration and renewal of registration needs to be obtained from Regional Health Directorate. And lastly, for 50 to 200 bedded and more than 200-bedded hospitals registration and renewal of registration needs to be obtained from Department of Health Services

and the Ministry of Health and population respectively. Among 81 functional research centers, only 30 percent are involved in any kind of research. The study found a lack of knowledge and awareness among the participants regarding doing research or the importance of research. So, a strong policy needs to be adopted to ensure participation from all health-related institutions in research activities.

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