

EDITORIAL

RESEARCH AS A NATIONAL AGENDA

Malaysia plans to be a developed country by 2020 with research being now designated as a national agenda. Research will be the main driver to steer the country forward from an agricultural and manufacturing economy to a knowledge based economy (K-economy) in the 21st century. The government of Malaysia has placed the necessary political will and financial support to make this agenda a reality. At least RM 1.7 billion has been provided through the various national research grants in the 9th Malaysia Plan for research. These grants are channeled through the various ministries such as Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI), Ministry of Health (MOH), research universities and other government institutions. Many of the research grants under MOHE and MOSTI have been fully subscribed. However research grants under the MOH amounting to about RM 92 million are still available for MOH researchers and officers.

The research scenario in Malaysia is expected to leap forward in the near future. MOSTI plans to increase the critical mass of researchers, scientists and engineers to 50 per 10,000 workers by 2010.1 The research universities and other research based institutions will be the main bases for the human capital for research. The increasing number of post-doctoral positions and postgraduate programs will complement the human capital needed for research. Various financial incentives have been put in place to attract both foreign and Malaysian scientists based overseas back to Malaysia under the Brain Gain Program to jump-start this research agenda. The 'publish or perish' culture has taken a stronger footing within the local academia in the wake of these developments and the increasingly competitive and globalised world.

For many of the MOH officers, the research acculturation is not as widespread as that seen in the universities. The impact is more focused in many of the research institutes such as the Institute for Medical Research. While research carried out in these institutes are more on fundamental and applied research, the MOH field officers can focus on service based research such as health system research, which will generate relevant local knowledge to improve health care, foster health development

and reduce health inequity through the promotion of health and community development. Professor Ahmad Zewail, the Linus Pauling Professor of Chemical Physics and Professor of Physics at California Institute of Technology, who won the 1999 Nobel Prize in Chemistry said ' If we work on research topics that the West is not interested in, we will always be 20 years ahead. If we work on topics that the West is interested in, we will always be 20 years behind'. Tropical diseases found in countries such as Malaysia and health systems in developing countries are examples of research areas which the MOH officers can focus on in order to be 20 years ahead and become leading researchers in that research topic. It is hoped that many of the MOH field officers will start doing research with funding from the RM 92 million research budget under the MOH.

As before, this MJPHM issue consists of papers on a wide range of public health issues in Malaysia and I would like to thank the authors for their support. This augurs well with the role of MJPHM to provide an avenue for local public health specialists and researchers to communicate their research findings. It is well known that many relevant local health researches are not communicated and disseminated in the form of journal publications, which will be accessible to the public. Many are hidden from public knowledge in the form of reports stored in health institutions throughout the country. The international comparison of knowledge production from the ISI data 1981-2002 saw Malaysia at the 55th position, contributing only 0.08% of all papers published. For those of us here at the MJPHM Secretariat, we will do our utmost to get as many local public health researches submitted to be published.

Reference

1. MOSTI Introduction to Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation Malaysia. (2008) Available from <http://www.mosti.gov.my> (accessed 1 August 2008)