

Brief Communication (On Career Counselling)

Educational and Postgraduate Study Opportunities, For an Ophthalmology Resident in Pakistan

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Ophthalmology postgraduate training in Pakistan has undergone a significant reforms and modifications in the last one decade. There are currently two categories of ophthalmology postgraduate courses in Pakistan i.e. two year courses of MCPS or DOMS and four year courses of FCPS or MS. Among these membership/fellowship programs are offered by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan (CPSP) while Diplomas and Master degree programs are offered by the Medical Universities. PM&DC the former medical licensing body of Pakistan categorized two year postgraduate programs as level- and four year postgraduate programs as level-qualifications, which differ in scale of appointment and promotion preference. Recently Pakistan Medical Commission (PMC), the successor of PM&DC, has categorized postgraduate qualifications into additional, postgraduate and alternative qualifications.¹

A resident ophthalmologist after starting postgraduate (PG) training in ophthalmology can also avail additional opportunities besides continuing with the course in which he/she is admitted.

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Foreign Postgraduate Courses

Ophthalmology residents can pursue postgraduate fellowship programs offered by the Royal Colleges of United Kingdom (UK) along with their PG training in Pakistan. These fellowships are nationally as well as internationally recognized qualifications in ophthalmology, which can be completed without having any work experience in UK. Successful completion of fellowship with any of the Royal College of UK, allows a candidate to get himself registered with the General Medical Council (GMC).² Details about these colleges and their exams are given below.

1. The Royal College of Ophthalmologists (RCOphth):

The fellowship of RCOphth (FRCOphth) is open for the international ophthalmology residents. Eligibility criteria to appear in part 1 fellowship exam of RCOphth require no previous experience in ophthalmology. From 2020 onward, the part 1 exam is conducted online and candidates can appear in exam from their home. Part 1 is followed by 'refraction certificate' which can be taken in centers where exam is offered. Currently there is no exam center in Pakistan for RCOphth 'refraction certificate' and a candidate is required to travel out of country for appearing in this exam. Successful completion of part 1 and refraction certificate leads to part 2 fellowship exam of RCOphth which is in fact the exit exam of this fellowship having written and oral components.³ Currently there is no exemption criteria or reciprocity for RCOphth fellowship examination. The website of RCOphth www.rcophth.ac.uk, is updated regularly and most recent information can be found by visiting website of the college.

2. Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (RCSEd)

Fellowship of RCSEd in ophthalmology (FRCSEd) is GMC enlisted acceptable post graduate qualification² and also recognized by PMC as a foreign post graduate qualification. Recently RCSEd has collaborated with The International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO) for their written examinations.⁴ Successful completion of FRCSEd part B or equivalent reciprocal exams conducted by ICO leads to the award of membership of RCSEd (MRCSEd). Success in part C, which requires 4-year experience to appear in this exam, leads to award of FRCSEd.

3. Royal College of Physician and Surgeons Glasgow (RCPSG)

Fellowship of RCPSG in ophthalmology (FRCS) is another pathway which can be opted during ophthalmology PG training in Pakistan.⁵ The exam reciprocity of RCSEd, RCPSG and ICO exams allows a candidate to pursue fellowships of both these colleges at the same time but final parts i.e. Part 3 or part C are to be passed by each of these colleges separately. Eligibility to appear in part 2 of FRCS ophthalmology by RCPSG requires a candidate to have 5 year of clinical experience in ophthalmology. Written exams can be taken in Pakistan, but for clinical exam a candidate needs to travel out of country because currently no exam center is available in Pakistan.

4. International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO)

ICO exams consist of standard and advanced examination. Successful completion of these exams lead to award of fellowship with ICO (FICO).⁶ FICO is not recognized as a licensed postgraduate qualification either by GMC or PMC. However successful completion of ICO exams allows a candidate to get exemption from all written exams of FRCSEd (part A and part B) and part 1 and part 2 (MCQ's) portion of FRCS Glasgow. Candidates who are successful in ICO exams also have improved chances to get selected for fellowships offered by ICO or other international ophthalmology fellowships e.g. international ophthalmological fellowship

foundation⁷ after completing their post graduations.

Memberships and License of Internationally Recognized Ophthalmological Organizations:

A PG-student during ophthalmology residency in Pakistan can also claim free membership of international organizations of ophthalmology including American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) ophthalmic news and education(ONE[®]) Network⁸ as well as European Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery (ESCRS).⁹

- **AAO ONE[®] Network** provides an updated educational content to the licensed members including free access to Academy MCQ's pool, clinical videos, case discussions and ophthalmology journals.⁸ The educational content available on AAO ONE network is updated regularly and is also a valuable resource while preparing for MCQ based exams in ophthalmology. A candidate wishing to seek access to AAO ONE network need to send a request email to oneintl@aao.org stating that he/she is located in Pakistan.
- **European Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery (ESCRS)** also offers free trainee membership to ophthalmology residents less than 35 years of age. ESCRS members get benefits of free access to ESCRS journals, research grants and i-learn online courses.⁹ A candidate wishing to get the membership of ESCRS is required to fill an online form available on website <https://www.es CRS.org/> and needs to produce a certificate from his/her supervisor or head of department stating the candidates date of birth and training duration.

British Pakistani Ophthalmic Society (BPOS):

BPOS conducts educational webinars and grand rounds which include case presentations by young residents. These webinars are hosted by a panel of high profile speakers from UK and Pakistan. These webinars provide an excellent opportunity to the young residents to learn about national ophthalmology practice in relation to international advancements. All webinars can be attended free of cost by registering

form their website <https://bpos.org.uk/> or their Facebook page. BPOS also offers specialty fellowships for ophthalmologists in Pakistan. Recently they have launched an electronic audit tool which can be used for keeping record of departmental and personal audit.

Educational Websites and Online Courses

There is a long list of online websites which offer educational content related to ophthalmology. A few of these resources include timroot.com, eyewiki.org, cataractcoach.com, eyerounds.org, retinapodcast.com, octcases.com, eyeguru.org.¹⁰

- **Cybersight (Orbis)**

Cyber sight is a telemedicine initiative founded by Orbis International which operates from United States. They offer online courses (with certification of completion), educational webinars, online library and artificial intelligence based online consultation facility for developing countries. Detailed information can found from their website <https://cybersight.org/>.

Research Grants and Opportunities

A resident can also avail research grants offered by ophthalmological organizations mentioned above, by sharing their research proposal. The members of societies like ESCRS and RCSEd can also avail travel and educational grants to participate in an educational events. To find updates about research grants a candidate can subscribe to the official social media pages of these societies or their news letters sent via email.

Facebook/WhatsApp/YouTube Educational Groups & Channels

Most of the renowned ophthalmologists have found their YouTube channels and share their experience on these channels regularly. Besides this, there are educational groups on WhatsApp, where a participant can share cases for discussion and can seek advice from the subject specialists.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the PG residency in ophthalmology is not limited to institutional educational activities only. A resident can avail a lot more opportunities by utilizing online educational forums. By planning to

appear in foreign postgraduate exams along with national postgraduate exams, a resident can also get foreign postgraduate fellowship staying in their home country.

Conflict of Interest

Author declared no conflict of interest.

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Author's Designation and Contribution

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