

# Why a Medical Career and What are the Pros and Cons of medical profession: Beliefs of Students at Lumbini Medical College

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## ABSTRACT:

**Introduction:** Medicine is one of the noblest of all professions and is one of the rapidly expanding fields with increasing number of private medical colleges in the past few years. Several international studies over the years have explored perceptions and preferences of students in choosing a career in medicine. This study was done with the objective to assess students' views regarding selection of medicine as a career. **Methods:** A survey study was conducted at Lumbini Medical College Teaching Hospital (LMCTH) where 300 students of both sexes were asked to fill a structured questionnaire. **Results:** All medical students mentioned that they selected the medical profession because of personal interest. Of them, 285 (95%) students believed this profession offers services to humanity. However, 240 (80%) students felt that their family had an influence in their career selection. Among discouraging factors, 234 (78%) students mentioned that medical training is difficult and prolonged, 210 (70%) students said that the course is too expensive, 225 (75%) students felt that there is too much competition while 186 (62%) students expressed that doctors have excessive working hours and lack social life. Major factors in choosing LMCTH as study destination were compulsion because of failure to enroll at other colleges 180(60%), easy access to admission 120 (40%), cheaper than other medical colleges 165 (55%) and location near to hometown 24 (8%). Some of the discouraging factors were limited facilities 210 (70%), insufficient faculty members 270 (90%), newly established college and uncertain future 90 (30%). **Conclusion:** Study concluded that reasons for joining medical profession are primarily based on personal interest, respect and honor, family influence and service to humanity; however, long working hours, prolonged training, expensive study, discourages many students.

**Keywords:** medical profession • encouraging • discouraging factors

## INTRODUCTION:

Medicine is the applied science or practice of the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease.<sup>1</sup> It is one of the noblest of all professions, takes its name from the Latin word 'ars medicina', which means the art of healing.<sup>2</sup> In Nepal, it is widely sought after and

is one of the rapidly expanding fields with increasing number of private medical colleges in the last few years. Several international studies over the years have explored perceptions and preferences of students in choosing a career in medicine. Also, sometimes medical students and graduates face the dilemma of remaining in or leaving the profession.<sup>3</sup> The most important determinants of career choice in previous studies appeared to be personal interest, opportunity, flexible working hours and part-time practice. In the recent past, it has been observed that students mostly from a middle class background and having an outstanding academic record at high schools are able to get admission in medical colleges. The professional beliefs of burgeoning medical students have been studied in a number of other countries.<sup>4-6</sup> In most of the studies of developed countries, the majority of respondents reported that their interest in interaction with people, a wide range of job opportunities, fact

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that medicine is a highly-appreciated profession and their desire to acquire more knowledge greatly influenced their decision to enter medicine.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, today's students are reported to have different work priorities and personal motivations, both of which impact learning.<sup>8,9</sup> How well the findings from international studies generalize to students at Nepal medical schools is unclear due to likely differences in culture, institutional practices, health systems and medical practice. Our study evaluates the perceptions and preferences of Nepalese students regarding career selection. The aim of our study was to investigate the merits and demerits of medical profession as visualized by the medical students in their career selection. The reasons that influence students to choose medicine and their association with a satisfying career will be established.

**METHODS:**

A survey study based on convenience sampling was done at Lumbini Medical College Teaching Hospital, Palpa Nepal, where 300 students of both sexes from pre-clinical (first and second year) and clinical science (third and fourth year) were included; 150 from pre-clinical and 150 from clinical side. They were asked to fill a structured questionnaire and the results were analyzed using Microsoft excel. All potential responders were clearly advised that participation in this survey was voluntary and anonymous.

**RESULTS:**

Out of the 350 questionnaires distributed, 300 were returned completed and 20 were incompletely filled up. Characteristics of students are given in Table 1.

Average age of respondents was 20.2 years and majorities were males 186(62%). 252(84%) of students were from urban areas of different parts of Nepal. 294(98%) of students secured at least first division at School Leaving Certificate and intermediate level. Majority 240(80%) of the students' mothers were working as housewives (Table 1) and majority of the fathers were engaged in business of various kinds. Participants were asked to indicate their responses regarding their selection of medicine as a career (Fig 1).

Of the 300 students, 100% students considered that they had a personal interest in studying medicine. 240 (80%) students were of the opinion that their families influenced them to become doctors, whereas the factor of "respect and honor" inspired 258 (86%) students in choosing their profession. 66 (22%) students had doctors in their families. 66 (22%) students believed that there was a great financial reward for doctors. Interestingly, about one quarter 69 (23%) students believed that they were studying medicine as a means to go abroad. A greater proportion of students (92%) were satisfied with their medical profession and 261 (87%) students expressed their willingness to reselect medicine if they were given a second chance. Among discouraging factors, 270 (90%) of students said that study is too expensive and 246 (82%) of

Table 1: Characteristics of students included in study (N=300)

No. of pre-clinical students	150
No. of clinical students	150
Age (years), median (range)	18-23
Male	186 (62%)
Hometown	Urban-252(84%), Rural - 84 (28%)
Schooling of students	Boarding school-288(96%) Community school-12(4%)
College	Private- 288 (96%) Government-12 (4%)
Parents profession	
Mother	Housewife-240(80%), Others- 60 (20%)
Father	Business-165(55%) Government post-66 (22%) Health professional 45(15%) Farmer-15 (5%) Others-9 (3%)

students felt that it is difficult and prolonged training whereas 240(80%) students believed that there is too much competition in medicine.

Excessive working hours of doctors discouraged 120 (40%) students whereas 60 (20%) students believed that doctors have no social life. Surprisingly, 36 (12%) of the students thought that medicine offers less financial rewards. 15 (5%) of the students had the impression that doctors run after money and parents are losing faith in doctors. Students were asked about future plan after completion of study and the response were that they will work in urban area 180 (60%), work in rural area 168 (56%), join government service 60 (20%), respect medical ethics and run after money 282 (94%), have academic interest and join teaching institution 33 (11%), go abroad 15 (5%), earn as much as money by any possible means 9 (3%) and establish their own hospital 9 (3%). Major factors in choosing LMC as study destination were compulsion because of failure to enroll at other colleges for 180 (60%), easy access to admission for 120 (40%), cheaper than other medical colleges for 165 (55%) and located near hometown for

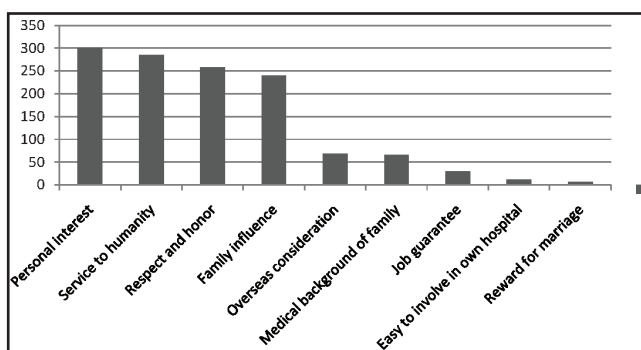


Fig 1: Factors for choosing medicine as a profession (N-300)

24 (8%) students. Some of the discouraging factors were limited facilities 210 (70%), insufficient faculty members in 270 (90%), newly established college and uncertain future for 90 (30%) students. When asked about the areas which can be improved at Lumbini Medical College, majority students responded that there are insufficient faculty members 270 (90%), limited facilities like place and quality of food, playing ground, library facilities, internet service, and improper administrative management. 225 (75%) students responded that they will recommend their relatives to choose medicine as a career. 252 (84%) students feel insecure about joining post graduate training after completion of MBBS. 240 (80%) students feel that MBBS curriculum is tougher than expected. 36 (12%) of students feel pressured from their parents to earn amount of money spent during their study. 100% students opined that hard work, guidance from teachers and punctuality are required to be a good MBBS graduate. Students would choose Kathmandu Medical College 105 (35%), Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences 84 (28%), Manipal Medical College 36 (12%) if they had opportunity to do so.

## DISCUSSION:

Medical profession is said to be a noble one and has its own merits and demerits. Doctor's professional life is filled with care for people, interaction with people from different backgrounds, challenges, knowledge and wisdom. According to a report of Royal College of Physicians, the core values of the medical profession are integrity, compassion, altruism and excellence that are glued to a set of values including team work and continuous improvement.<sup>10</sup> The top ranking reason why almost all students chose medicine as a career was based on personal interest, service to humanity and respect and honor. Studies done in the West reported that 70% of the males and females chose this profession because they had high interest in it.<sup>11</sup> In our study, 300 (100%) students considered that they had a personal interest in studying medicine. A high proportion of students 225 (75%) were encouraged by their families which showed that family support/pressure was a major factor in influencing young minds which has also been reported by Ehsan et al, in his study.<sup>12</sup> Surprisingly, for only 66 (22%) students, monetary reward was one of the considerations. Hence, from our study, we could clearly make out that students still believed in the core values of this profession and money was not their only priority. 246 (82%) medical students put up the argument that medicine was too tough with stressful life, excessive work load and long working hours which left very less time for family and friends.

According to our study, 39 (13%) of students mentioned that they would not go into medicine again as compared to an American study in which 66 (22%) of the respondents expressed their reluctance.<sup>13</sup> 66 (22%) students were of the opinion that medicine offered less financial reward and security. Medicine is

regarded as a noble career as during their education, medical students work as health coaches, advising and helping people about basic health issues, solving their everyday problem, thereby enjoying respect and honor.<sup>14</sup> Efforts can be made to reduce long working hours and improve salaries. The salaries of doctors of our country can be increased. Doctors are the most highly paid professionals in America with residents of radiology and anesthesia earning \$350,000 and \$275,000 annually, respectively.<sup>15</sup> This fascinates our doctors and unfortunately our country loses brilliant brains to America, Europe and Australia. Well structured medical curriculum and organized training programs along with proper numeration and incentive to doctors may encourage doing noble deeds and reducing malpractice.

## CONCLUSION:

This study suggests that the reasons for joining medical profession are primarily based on personal interest, respectful living, family influence and service to humanity. However, though a respectable profession but training is expensive, difficult with long working hours and less financial reward. A high proportion of medical students was dissatisfied by their profession and did not want to reenter if they were given a second chance of career selection; however, as the students enter the clinical years, their level of interest increases. In order to make medicine attractive, sustainable efforts are required which provide promising opportunities to medical students and doctors.

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