

Editorial

SHOULD MEDICINE BE TAUGHT IN URDU ?

There can be no two opinions on a simple assertion that education should be in one's mother tongue. As such there should have been no necessity of a debate on whether our higher education including Medicine should be in Urdu or not. Why then does this issue crop up every now and then? Firstly, at present the system of higher education is in English, the teachers have been trained in English speaking countries, the textbooks are in English and any big and fundamental change is opposed by the very magnitude of the undertaking. Then there is the very simple fact that the requisite books and the scientific terminology is not there which is the bare minimum needed to start the venture. Efforts of the Osmania University and local attempts are a beacon but not enough for the requirements of an upto date modern Medical Education curriculum particularly in the specialities. Also, there is a more deep rooted problem. While other countries may have a mother tongue, we have a national language. It is true that while Urdu is the most used and most widely spoken of any languages in Pakistan, it is not the mother tongue of a very large majority of this country. It is a small number of people who master the language at a level necessary for a venture of this magnitude. People whose mother tongue is not Urdu and who have been educated in English find a difficulty in this re-orientation. Lastly, as Medicine is a rapidly advancing science and with local research near to zero we have to look constantly to the English Speaking World to update our knowledge. To recall, the English speaking medical scholars had to know German in the early part of this century for keeping up with

original research or, for that matter the Western World had to know Arabic, Latin and Greek for higher learning some centuries ago. Knowledge belongs to those who seek it and only for as long as they seek it.

All having been said and debated, what do we do? I think the efforts should be in the direction of teaching and learning the basic medical sciences in Urdu and developing a scientific terminology. One can see this being done in parts in our Universities. When this has been done to a satisfactory level, approaches can be made into the clinical sciences. Presently, in the area of clinical sciences much remains to be done and very little effort is visible. English must by necessity continue as medium of instruction until such time as the appropriate and updated medical textbooks are available. However, there is nothing preventing teachers from voluntarily making efforts towards attempting texts in Urdu.

Finally then, should Medicine be taught in Urdu? The answer is a very definite "YES". But, for now we must ask a more immediately pertinent question—"Can Medicine be taught in Urdu presently?". To this the sad answer is "No"!

Editor.