



Editorial

# The AO Program for Education and Excellency in Research (AO PEER): A Design for Surgeons by Surgeons

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The careers of surgeons differ from other disciplines in medicine in many ways and certainly so in basic scientific research. Engaging in basic science research, formulating a research question, and designing and conducting a study appear to be formidable tasks for standalone practitioners. During training and early in the career, achieving surgical competence remains the foremost focus amid long and unscheduled work hours. The responsibilities of clinical work take precedence as the career progresses. Nonetheless, devoting time to reading, reflection, discussion, documentation, manuscript writing, and publishing will lead to different levels of participation in research and a successful research career. Seasoned surgeons can certainly offer a unique insight into their clinical problems and share them with their peers, thus fostering good clinical practice (GCP). Considerable clinical resources and experience remain untapped without effort to understand the importance of research and publication. To emphasize this, I would like to draw your attention to the AO Program for Education and Excellence in Research (AO PEER), a dedicated division of the AO foundation, to guide research and publication<sup>1</sup> (► Fig. 1).

The AO PEER is a knowledge platform designed for medical professionals who are actively engaged in clinical work. It offers courses taught by AO faculty from different divisions with years of experience in research and publishing. For those who desire to learn and upgrade their clinical research competencies, there are three levels of structured courses. The topics packed in different teaching modules meet the needs of basic and advanced researchers involved in clinical and translational research (► Fig. 2).

There are interactive online and face-to-face courses for all levels of participants. A self-directed online course on

## AO PEER Program for Education and Excellence in Research

**Fig. 1** The AO Program for Education and Excellence in Research (AO PEER).



**Fig. 2** Structured courses of AO Program for Education and Excellence in Research (AO PEER). GCP, good clinical practice.

clinical research principles with recorded lectures, interactive lessons, and a discussion forum is best suited for a beginner. This 20-hour course includes eight modules spanning five weeks. They learn about the fundamentals of research, the basics of GCP, formulating a study question, how to do a literature review, basic statistics, grant writing, manuscript writing, and so on.

The interactive face-to-face courses are conducted for both basic and advanced levels of participants (► Fig. 3).

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**Fig. 3** Participants and teachers in level 1&2 AO Program for Education and Excellence in Research (AO PEER) course at AO headquarters—2019, Davos.

Along with short didactic presentations, workshops and group discussions are included for comprehensive learning. The level 1 basic course is a day and a half long and covers everything a clinician needs to begin research. The topics include the importance of research in daily practice, evidence based medicine, obtaining ethical committee approval, informed consent process, selecting a study design, sample size calculation, basics of statistics, demonstration of literature search, the role of a research team, tips for manuscript writing, reviewing a paper section-wise, reference manager, and so on. Interactive workshops encourage participants to deliberate on common problems and mistakes to find the right solution with the facilitators.

The level 2 course deals with much deeper issues of research, including essential documentation and specific laws in ethical issues, declaring a conflict of interests, obtaining consent in various situations, patients privacy protocols, initiation and monitoring the study, data collection, handling samples, quality control, issues related to medical device and safety, budget calculation and funding, medical writing, and so on. These are addressed in detail along with interactive workshops, group discussions, and practical exercises (► Fig. 4).

Besides these two courses, the platform provides several interesting and useful topics, such as using statistical software, calculating health economics, the principles of data management, personal data protection and big data analytics, using the Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) system for documentation, etc. Various checklist templates are available to assist researchers in adopting a simple and organized approach. Even for those with signif-



**Fig. 4** A lecture session of a level 2 course.

icant experience in research and publishing, it helps them master to enhance the quality of research and get it published.

Over several decades, the AO divisions have brought together the expertise of different fields to help clinicians across the globe with education, treatment guidelines, and research.<sup>2</sup> Many of them have been trained to become educators and leaders. With over 4.5 lakhs global AO community, annually, 775 educational events are held with one lakh participants, contributed by 7,000 faculty worldwide. The AO PEER is another credible division providing a valuable platform to engage with research experts. This is all the more unique as teachers themselves are busy surgeons who understand the needs of practicing surgeons and guide them

toward improvement. It is worthwhile for readers to explore more and its benefits for their academic endeavors.

#### Conflict of Interest

The author is a faculty of AO PEER and AO CMF.

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