

LETTER TO THE EDITOR



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Empowering early-career health professions educators: Reflections from a dental perspective

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Dear Editor,

As an early-career dental educator navigating the formative years of an academic journey, I write to share reflections on what it means to grow within health professions education today. Across Asia and beyond, rapid shifts in healthcare delivery, digital innovation, and interprofessional practice are reshaping educational expectations. Amidst these changes, the sustainability of our educational systems depends significantly on how we support and empower educators at the beginning of their academic journeys. The transition from clinician to academician is challenging. Many early-career educators enter academia with strong clinical expertise, only to realise that effective teaching, curriculum design, assessment, research, and leadership demand additional competencies. Clinical excellence does not automatically translate into educational effectiveness, and thus, structured faculty development becomes a strategic investment in educational excellence and institutional sustainability.

For dental educators, this moment presents a call to action. Dentistry should not remain insular within the broader health professions education discourse. Engagement in interprofessional scholarship, collaborative curriculum initiatives, and shared development platforms enables dental academicians to both contribute to and benefit from collective advancement. Conferences such as the Asia Pacific

Medical Education Conference (APMEC) exemplify the power of the academic community. Beyond research presentations (Centre for Medical Education, 2026), they provide opportunities for networking, mentorship, visibility, and create spaces to initiate collaborations that transcend institutional and national boundaries. Yet external opportunities alone are insufficient. Early-career academicians must pursue intentional growth through continuous professional development in education, whether via attending conferences, workshops, certifications, or postgraduate study. Journals such as *The Asia Pacific Scholar (TAPS)* play an important role in legitimising and disseminating educational scholarship within the region. Faculty development must also address the human dimension of academic life (Sabedra et al., 2025). Burnout, imposter syndrome, and competing responsibilities frequently affect early-career faculty, making mentorship, peer support, and institutional recognition essential.

Reflecting on my journey, I have come to appreciate that academic growth is not solitary. It is sustained through collaboration, humility, and shared purpose. Supporting early-career educators is not simply an act of mentorship; it is an investment in the future of health professions education. I encourage fellow early-career academicians across all health professions to step forward with confidence; share your ideas, engage actively in dialogue, seek collaborations beyond your discipline, and invest intentionally in your development as both educator and researcher. In doing so, we not only shape

our own trajectories but collectively strengthen the communities we serve.

Notes on Contributors

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