

Rheumatology as a Career Choice for Medical Students in Saudi Arabia: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Rheumatology is the branch of internal medicine concerned with the care and diagnosis of auto-inflammatory, autoimmune, and rheumatic disorders affecting the bones, musculoskeletal, and other organs. There is an international concern that rheumatology has lost its interest as a sub-specialty for internal medicine residents. The aim of this study is to explore university medical students and interns' interest in rheumatology as a career in Riyadh City, Saudi Arabia.

Methods: This is an online cross-sectional survey study that was conducted on universities medical students in Saudi Arabia between January and April 2024. This study examined influencing factors of students' exposure to rheumatology and attitude towards rheumatology as a career. Logistic regression analysis was used to identify predictors of planning to practice rheumatology as a career.

Results: A total of 466 students participated in this study. The majority of respondents (88.6%) reported having prior exposure to rheumatology during their medical education. Among these, 29.0% had 4-8 hours of exposure. Most of the students first encountered rheumatology during the clinical years of medical school (53.4%). A small percentage (6.4%) are planning to pursue rheumatology as a career. Among those interested in rheumatology, 60.0% were influenced by work hours and lifestyle, while 50.0% cited both having a family/friend with a rheumatologic disease and research experience. Conversely, lack of clinical exposure (46.1%) and knowledge about the subject (43.6%) were the primary negative factors. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that rheumatology physicians play an integral part in Saudi Arabia's healthcare system (79.2%) and enjoy their work (57.7%). Conversely, fewer respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Saudi Arabia has a very serious shortage of rheumatology physicians (25.3%) and that there is a lack of diversity in pathology in rheumatology (25.1%). Students' willingness to practice rheumatology as a career based on their university of study ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: Our study found that most medical students were exposed to rheumatology during clinical years, although few plan to pursue it as a career. Work-life balance and personal ties are positives, while clinical exposure and knowledge are hurdles. Medical curricula should include more hands-on rheumatology training and knowledge to promote interest in this important profession.

Keywords: Career; Interns; Medical; Rheumatology; Saudi Arabia; Students

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