

## Response to A Al-Judaibi *et al.*: Barriers to research productivity among physicians in Saudi Arabia: Taking a deep dive into the world of academia

We would like to thank Al-Judaibi *et al.* for their interest on our recently published paper that addressed research barriers among gastroenterologists in Saudi Arabia.<sup>[1,2]</sup> We appreciate their comments on our findings. Al-Judaibi *et al.* provide an incisive analysis of the research barriers identified in our study and suggested some practical pathways to overcome those barriers, some of which rely on the researchers themselves.

Al-Judaibi *et al.* analyzed the reported insufficient research time as a barrier to research productivity in relationship to clinical duties, reflected by the reported average number of weekly patients per the respondents. We agree that the number of weekly patients reported by approximately half of the respondents appears modest, and based on this it appears that sufficient time for research might be available for most survey participants. However, as appropriately mentioned by Al-Judaibi *et al.*, we did not account for time allocated for other administrative, clinical, and academic responsibilities. Some insights on this could be extrapolated from our findings that only 5% of the respondents have 30% or more of their time allocated for research activities. However, it is also important to consider that 85.9% of the respondents had at least one prior research participation of any type, and approximately 67% had been a primary investigator at least once in the last 5 years, while a quarter had been a primary investigator at least once a year. Such participation rate is heartening based on the understanding that only 16% of the respondents work in a university-based practice. It is worth noting that the response rate in our study was relatively low at 39%. Those who value medical research are much more likely to have participated in our survey. We agree that efficiency in utilizing time allocated for research is required. However, such efficiency requires training in research skills and effective research environment, both of which appear to be deficient. For instance, insufficient research training and lack of a statistician are reported by 64% and 68% of the respondents, respectively. We also agree that establishing academic research tracks with clear goals and expectations would help to improve the research environment and lead to better utilization of research time.

Al-Judaibi *et al.* also commented on the lack of funding, which was reported as a major barrier to research productivity among the survey respondents. We agree that researchers should actively seek funding for their research projects, particularly since some research funding sources have now become available. Nevertheless, writing effective research grants is a skill that could be lacking in many of those interested in research, but such skill could be improved by providing research training or mentorship. We support the comment by Al-Judaibi *et al.* that early research exposure has a strong influence on later involvement in research. We have suggested introducing research training and conducting research projects early in medical schools and residency programs as one of the interventions to promote research activities. We are glad that some of the medical schools and residency training programs have lately mandated students and residents to have some sort of research participation as a requirement for graduation.

Once again, we would like to thank Al-Judaibi *et al.* for their insightful comments on our paper. We hope the burden of the research barriers shrinks as research awareness increases, and more interventions are applied.

### Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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Access this article online	
<b>Quick Response Code:</b>	<b>Website:</b> www.saudijgastro.com
	<b>DOI:</b> 10.4103/sjg.sjg_59_21

**How to cite this article:** Al safi M, Al Ameel T, Al Sardi M, Al Asker D, Al Sulais E. Response to AAI-Judaibi *et al.*: Barriers to research productivity among physicians in Saudi Arabia: Taking a deep dive into the world of academia. Saudi J Gastroenterol 2021;27:178-9.

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