

Harvard, MIT clinical research course now in India

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Mumbai: A new introductory course on clinical research has been introduced at the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) under its recent collaboration with MIT called EdX. The course is called Quantitative Methods in Clinical and Public Health Research and would be offered online to students in India and around the world beginning in October 2012.

Dr Swati Piramal, vice chairperson, Piramal Group, India, who was recently elected to the Harvard Board of Overseers, was instrumental in bringing the course to India. According to Dr Swati Piramal, an alumna of Harvard School of Public Health, a course like this is a great opportunity for physicians in India. She said, "One of the big shortages we have in Indian science is the lack of research curriculum in our medical training. India has over 900,000 doctors but few are trained to be physician scientists. This is a glaring gap in our country."

The course is an online adaptation of material from the Harvard School of Public Health's classes in epidemiology and biostatistics and will be taught by two renowned Harvard professors, Dr Earl Francis Cook and Dr Marcello Pagano. The delivery of the course plans to move beyond the standard model of online education that relies on watching video content and will offer an interactive experience for students.

Dr Swati Piramal, who has also received India's highest civilian honour, the Padma Shri award, said that, "Providing medical doctors an introduction to the science of quantitative methods can be the first step toward interesting more of our physicians to become top professionals in clinical research and become investigators for clinical trials. While clearly more than a single course is needed to create highly qualified clinical investigators, an online course like this can be an initial step toward raising the standards of medical research, which will help to reduce the burden of disease."

The course will cover the principles of biostatistics and epidemiology used for public health and clinical research. These include outcomes measurement, measures of associations between outcomes and their determinants, study design options, bias and confounding, probability and diagnostic tests, confidence intervals and hypothesis testing, power and sample size determinations, life tables and survival methods, regression methods (both, linear and logistic), and sample survey

techniques.