

Letter to Editor

Underused Handheld Ultrasound in General Practice: A Pakistani Demand for Change

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Introduction

Dear Editor

We wish to highlight a critical gap in Pakistan's clinical practice—the underutilisation of handheld point-of-care ultrasound (POCUS) devices, such as the Butterfly iQ, particularly in outpatient settings managed by general practitioners (GPs).

Globally, including in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and parts of Asia, handheld ultrasound devices are increasingly crucial to general practice. These compact, high-resolution instruments are transforming front-line care by allowing real-time assessment of common conditions—abdominal pain, urinary retention, pleural effusion, soft tissue injuries, and early pregnancy viability—often eliminating the need immediate radiology referrals.¹⁻²

In contrast, Pakistan has yet to embrace this technological shift. Most general practitioners in outpatient departments continue to function without ultrasonographic support, leading to delayed diagnoses, increased costs, and inconsistent standard of care. Handheld ultrasound can facilitate timely, bedside decision making enhancing both patient satisfaction and diagnostic accuracy.³

This underuse stems primarily from limited training opportunities, insufficient exposure during medical education, and the perceived high costs of devices. However, with device prices steadily decreasing and accessible POCUS training now available through reputable online program, these barriers are no longer insurmountable. Integrating handheld ultrasound repre-

sents one of the most cost-effective improvement we could introduce in our primary care infrastructure.⁴ We urge that:

- POCUS be incorporated into undergraduate and postgraduate curricula in Pakistani medical institutions.
- General practitioners be incentivised—through professional credits or CME points—to adopt handheld ultrasound in clinical practices.
- Health policy-makers and medical societies formulate national frameworks to encourage the safe, ethical, and widespread use of this technology.

Pakistan is home to many skilled physicians. It is time we equip the tools that extend beyond the stethoscope—tools that enable faster, evidence-based bedside diagnostics, ultimately saving time, resources, and lives.

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