Medical graduates often face the challenge of whether to commit oneself to training in a medical speciality or to pursue a scientific project in frame of a postgraduate doctorate study. As current doctoral curricula assume full-time engagement, these paths are rather mutually exclusive. The aim was to design an organisational framework allowing for parallel medical specialist training and the conduct of a postgraduate research doctorate.

Adhering to the current doctorate at PMU (PhD Molecular Medicine), the formal requirements of the curriculum were translated into a model defining working periods allotted to either PhD work or medical training while ensuring full traceability of the particular workloads.

The organisation for a combined education (scientific PhD and medical training) is based on a temporal distinction between periods devoted to either PhD work or medical training. In a prototype time schedule, these phases are separated (collectively 50/50%) as alternating periods of 3-6 months. In the phases of full-time medical training, PhD lectures (e.g. seminars) are attended extra-occupationally as well as literature research and research project planning can be imputed to a plausible extent as curricular workload.

With respect to (inter)national comparability, any organisational elaboration of an established PhD study must preserve the full workload (180 ECTS) as defined in the curriculum. This is achieved here by strict separation of either PhD work or medical training. By allowing curricular workload to be imputed in free time or extra-occupationally, the PhD study can be completed in about 4.5 years – instead of 6 years provided that only 50% working time is available for PhD work. Highly individual
scheduling and middle-term commitment of both students and supervisors seem crucial for a successful implementation.

The current model provides a reasonable, traceable and time-efficient scheduling for parallel pursue of a scientific PhD and medical specialist training.