

AHPI Karnataka raises concerns over NMC Bill 2017

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To overcome the challenges being faced by the health sector in India, as highlighted by the Honorable Parliamentary Standing Committee in its report submitted to the parliament on March 8, 2016; the Government of India came up with the draft National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill 2017, aimed at creating of robust medical education regulatory system.

As per the committee report, there are huge gaps in availability of qualified doctors, specialist, and super specialist, and a huge geographical mal-distribution of medical colleges under which 2/3 medical colleges are in the regions representing 1/3 population. Moreover, the medical education regulatory framework is grossly inadequate and ineffective on ground. There is total disconnect between medical education system and needs of healthcare delivery system in the country.

Keeping above in view there has been long pressing need to reform medical education. Accordingly, Government of India came up with the draft National Medical Commission bill 2017, aimed at creating of robust medical education regulatory system. Considering that reforms in health systems of nation are closely linked with nation's medical education system, it is important that new system by way of NMC should be able to meet the challenges as mentioned above and take our health system to next level and make universal health coverage (UHC) a reality in near future.

There are however, certain areas of concern in the draft bill that need to be addressed if the objectives of having world class regulatory framework are to be fulfilled. These are as follows:

1. The proportion of elected representatives from medical fraternity in the proposed NMC 2017 is to the extent of 20% which is grossly inadequate and undermines the principles of democracy. This needs to be enhanced appropriately.
2. The founding principles of modern medicine are evidence-based and are rooted in standard treatment protocols, which have nothing in common with the traditional systems of medicine (AYUSH). Therefore, mixing up of these systems of medicine through bridge courses will in no way be appropriate. On the contrary it will undermine the patient safety and pave the way for promoting quackery.
3. Following successful completion of the MBBS examination enforcing another National Licentiate Examination is superfluous. However, those aspiring to do post-graduate courses can be made to appear for common PG-entrance examination.

Voicing his opinion, Dr BS Ajaikumar, Karnataka state president Association of Healthcare Providers of India said, "The draft NMC bill addresses the needs of healthcare across India, but there are certain parts which leave the door wide open for corruption. We should learn from history and ensure that the same mistakes and pitfalls are not replicated. An autonomous and independent body governing licensing, standardization, accreditation, governance and monitoring of medical education is the need of the hour. For this, I strongly recommend minimum government involvement and representation in the Committee and more participation of relevant stakeholders, in the same. Moreover, there should not be any bridging course for AYUSH doctors to practise Allopathic medicine. The Allopathic education criteria needs to be looked at realistically, thereby meeting the requirement rather than taking ad hoc firefighting decisions that will result in chaos."

According to Dr Thomas Chandy, Advisor, Association of National Board Accredited Institutions (ANBAI) Karnataka Chapter, "Medical education in India, particularly needs a serious spruce up. The NMC Bill will once and for all resolve the issue of equivalence between MD/MS & NBE degrees and there will be no disparity."

Speaking at the conference, Dr Alexander Thomas, President AHPI, said, "The bill should endeavor towards providing quality, affordable and accessible healthcare to the common man."

Dr V Narendranath, Joint Secretary, The Consortium of Accredited Healthcare Organisations (CAHO), "A comprehensive NMC Bill, will be instrumental in monitoring the quality of medical institutions, thereby ensuring the quality of medical graduates and in turn the quality of healthcare delivery.

Dr Devi P Shetty, Chairman, Narayana Health, and Founder Member AHPI, expressed his views on the current medical education system in India, "We need to increase the number of post graduate medical seats in our country, and also to bring down the cost of the medical education. The biggest problem in our country is that medical education is kept separated from rural healthcare. This situation definitely needs to be addressed. We are in dire need of more specialists in our country so as to ensure a better healthcare delivery system".