

What's happening in govt. medical colleges?



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Recently the National Medical Commission (NMC) withdrew the recognition for the MBBS courses in the state-run medical colleges - Stanley, Chennai, K.A.P. Viswanatham, Tiruchi and Dharmapuri college and then the issue became the talk of the town. The reasons cited for the move were that the colleges did not have CCTV cameras attached on their campus and follow the Aadhar-linked fingerprint biometric system. However, the state government has since rectified the deficiencies and got the recognition restored to the Stanley and Dharmapuri colleges.

The NMC could simply have asked the government to set right the defects it pointed out. But instead, it has gone to the extent of taking the most stringent action on the most trivial of grounds. It is quite unacceptable. If the withdrawal of recognition had been upheld, Tamil Nadu would have lost as many as 500 MBBS seats allotted by the government. In that case, it is the students from

the downtrodden and middle-class backgrounds who would have been worst hit.

Union govt's interference

Lots of changes have happened in the medical education in the past decade. Though health is a state subject, the union government has, for all practical purposes, brought medical education under its control. That is why it has set up the National Medical Commission, introducing several changes. Notably, the rule that a professor can hold two PG medical seats under his control has been relaxed so as to increase the number to four. Consequently, private colleges employ limited number of professors and get higher number of seats.

But that is not possible in government medical colleges because more patients are flocking the government hospital-cum-colleges and so it is impossible to run the institutions with the limited number of professors as suggested by the NMC. However, under the previous regime, making the most of the rule, several professors and assistant professors in the government medical colleges were compulsorily transferred.

Un sustained review

The government doctor associations were up in arms against the Tamil Nadu Health Department's move. The DMK, then in the opposition camp, supported the doctors on agitation who demanded that instead of following the NMC rule on number of professors, appointment of teachers be made in accordance with the number of patients visiting the hospital.

In view of this situation, former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, when in power, issued the G.O. No. 354 in 2009 that insisted on creating vacancies in medical colleges depending on the number of patients coming in. Besides, he made a provision that facilitates a once-in-five-year review of the vacancy position in order to

increase the vacancies, if need be. But no further review has since been conducted.

Additional burden

The NMC has come up with various guidelines to monitor the functioning of professors working in the medical colleges. Among them is the rule on Aadhar-linked fingerprint biometric system used to authenticate the presence of the professors in the colleges. But this system is possible only for employees working during defined hours. But there are no fixed working hours for doctors working in the government medical colleges. Moreover, they are additionally burdened with the work of taking care of court-related matters, managing medical camps and attaining medical insurance targets and so on.

Besides, there are practical complications in planting fingerprints in the scanner in the morning and evening. While the NMC is not ready to reconsider the attendance-monitoring mechanism, the Tamil Nadu government must take measures to regulate this. In view of the government doctors' critical position, their working hours must be defined.

What's the govt. stance?

The Tamil Nadu, of course, opposes the union government's interference in the state's health sector. But why does it support the filling of vacancies in the medical as well medically related sectors through the National Health Mission on contract basis? Why has it not stopped employment of doctors and other medical personnel for low pay on contract basis without following reservation rules?

Lots of vacancies of professor, associate professor and assistant professor in the government medical colleges have not yet been filled. The medical associations have come up with reports alleging that several government doctors have not been promoted. Besides, some associations have demanded restoration

of the G.O. 354 insisting on fixing the number of vacancies on the basis of the number of patients. But the government seems to be looking the other way.

Complaints back-to-back

The government doctors have been complaining that they are pressured to provide clinical treatment through insurance scheme and to attain targets in insurance-related treatments. There seems to be no treatment possible without insurance. Besides, the professors in all medical disciplines are very much occupied with taking care of insurance targets and procedures. As a result, they are unable to make time for teaching students and to follow the NMC's stipulations and guidelines, they say on a note of resentment.

In the past decade, the number of government medical colleges in Tamil Nadu has been ratcheting up. At present there are 38 government colleges in Tamil Nadu. To create appropriate vacancies, to fill sufficient vacancies of professor, associate professor and assistant professor, to take care of medical education, to comply with the NMC guidelines, to focus on medical research and to cater to the demands of patients.... all these mandatory functions of medical colleges cannot be administered by a single Directorate without difficulty.

So, an exclusive ministry for medical education must be created and all colleges brought under it so that inadequacies in the colleges are detected and set right, vacancies filled on time and the teaching staff's promotion and attendance taken care of in adherence to the NMC's new guidelines. Only then the medical colleges in Tamil Nadu which boasts of the highest number of the institutions, can be safeguarded.

Translated by V. Mariappan.