



## NEET is not enough to make everything neat - An opinion survey among leaders of medical profession regarding nationwide common entrance test for MBBS admissions in India.

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### ABSTRACT

Medical Education system of India is one of world's largest. Their quality is of global importance. Corruption in Indian Medical Education system warranted intervention of Supreme Court and led to discussions in International journals. Illegal capitation fee system blocks the admission of meritorious students and subverts the system. Capitation fee, corruption of licensing authorities, over investigations ordered by doctors, rising cost of health care and lowering of standards are inter linked. Regulation of admissions was expected to cleanse the system. National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) came into force from year 2016. This is the first report on its impact. An opinion survey was conducted among MCI members, Medical College Principals and IMA leaders. A six question questionnaire was created in Google survey forms and communicated through email. Responses received for three weeks. The table and graphs were generated in Excel. The results from groups were combined for analysis. One third of MCI members (38 out of 105 ie36%) responded while it was 3(1-5%) for IMA leaders and 6(2%) for Principals. Among the 47(7-8%) respondents 26(55%) reported admissions were NEET based, 21(45%) reported rank based, 13(28%)reported the application form was not available to all and 16(34%) reported lack of supervision. 37(79%)reported rise in the course fee and 15(32%)opined capitation fee could not be stopped. Number of responses from MCI members points to their sense of responsibility. Low responses from Principals were noteworthy. Many colleges could admit students outside NEET and avoid inter-se-merit; ignoring court verdict. Access to applications forms was limited. The hike in fee was the counter effect. NEET was opposed on the ground of favoring central syllabus in English medium, though supremacy of it over various state syllabi in vernacular is not established. Cautions expressed against coaching centers forming an obstacle before rural and socio-culturally underprivileged students. Rapid growth of Private sector in Indian Medical Education necessitated ensuring MCI norms strictly. Though MCI was unanimous for NEET, there was reluctance to ensure effective implementation. Centralised counseling was actually arranging country wide single window for admissions. But this was not argued prominently anywhere. NEET appears promising, but not enough.

**KEYWORDS** : Medical education- NEET- impact- capitation fee- MBBS admissions.

### Introduction

Medical Education system of India is one of the largest in the World. Every year 63535 students join MBBS course in the country conducted in 462 Medical Colleges 'affiliated to one of the 703 Universities'. A large number of passed out doctors from India move to other countries and many of them settle there for practice and living <sup>3</sup>. Many professional bodies have Indian Doctors at its helm. Currently the President of World Federation of Medical Associations is an Indian. What is happening in the field of Medical Education in the country is hence relevant worldwide.

A Nationwide entrance test (AIPMT for Government Medical Colleges) was cancelled once and retest conducted on order by Supreme Court of India following unearthing of wide spread corruption. Corruption in Indian medical colleges were reported and discussed even in journals of international repute. It is reported to be starting from licensing point of medical colleges. The existence of a nexus of private colleges, real estate lobbies, local politicians and doctors were alleged. Fraudulent entrants negate the chances of students with merit and subvert the system, experts opined<sup>4</sup>. Colleges collect huge amounts as the capitation fee. Knowing regulators collect a portion of it for licensing. Students go for higher studies in specialties having huge earning potential. They make use of investigations and interventions in their practice to recover already invested revenue<sup>5</sup>.

The capitation fee enables the system to run an underground parallel, sabotaging all the ethical values in medical practice. Regulation of admissions based strictly on merits upholding social justice would stop this practice and start cleansing the system. It was in this context National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) started. NEET is the entrance examination in India, for admissions to all medicine and dentistry courses in the country. It replaced all individual MBBS exams conducted by individual colleges, universities or state Governments themselves. NEET was proposed in 2012, came into operation on 5 May 2013 but cancelled by

Supreme Court on 18 July 2013; one day prior to the retirement of then Chief Justice. The Constitution bench of same Supreme Court recalled the verdict and NEET was restored on April 11, 2016 <sup>6</sup>. The Apex Court overruled all lower court verdicts and made centralized counseling mandatory for admissions (Live mint 2016).

Whether NEET could exert its intended effect or not is yet to be assessed. It is in this context this study was conducted.

### Methodology.

The objective of the study was to explore the extent of implementation and effect of nationwide common entrance test for medical college admission during the year 2016, the first year of its implementation.

An opinion survey was conducted among members of Medical Council of India (MCI), Principals of Medical Colleges and Members of central committees of Indian Medical Association (IMA). MCI is the regulator of Medical Profession in the country. The members belong to four categories - nominated by Government of India, nominated by State Governments, elected by the Faculty of Medical Colleges and elected from registered members of medical profession. The Principals of Medical colleges were those qualified professionals appointed by respective managements. IMA leaders were those elected by member doctors or nominated by those elected leaders. Their e-mail ids were collected from the MCI web site, College websites displayed in the MCI web site and official web site of IMA respectively.

Questionnaires of six questions with provision for yes/no/I don't know/other responses were created in Google survey forms with a single final provision for comments. The survey form was made available to all through e-mail communication. Responses received to the site in a period of three weeks were considered for the study. The last day of admissions was September 30, 2016 uniform to all colleges in this country the survey period was from October 7, 2016

to October 27. The table and graphs were generated in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet directly from the survey form. Considering the small number of responders in each category, the results were combined for analysis.

## Results

Though the contact e-mail ids were collected from official websites a large number of sent mails bounced (78 out of 596 ie 3-08%). Bounces were a few related to MCI members, but many related to both IMA office bearers and Principals of Medical Colleges (Table 1). The responses also showed same pattern; one third of MCI members (38 out of 105, ie 36%) responded while responses received from only 3(1.5%) of IMA leaders and 6(2%) of College Principals.

Responses to questions related to implementation are detailed in Graph 1. The responders reported that in only just above half of colleges, the admission was based on only NEET. Merit – the rank order in the list – was considered in less than half of colleges. In more than a quarter of colleges the application form was not accessible to everyone desirous of applying. Only about half of responders reported that there was an effective Governmental supervision over the selection and admission procedures.

The overall impressions of responders to the results of implementing NEET are given in Graph 2. About three fourth of them reported noticeable rise in the course fee of MBBS. Only about a quarter of responders reported that the capitation fee could be stopped during the current year by admissions in the present form.

## Discussion.

The collection of payment by educational bodies not included in the prospectus of the institution, in exchange for admission is the capitation fee. Academicians, students' organizations, political leaders and media many times voiced against it. Supreme Court of the country commented capitation fee as arbitrary, unfair, and in violation of the fundamental right to equality<sup>7</sup>. 'The Prohibition of Unfair Practices in Technical Educational Institutions, Medical Institutions and Universities Bill 2010' made it a cognizable offence<sup>8</sup>. Still it remains in Indian medical colleges and universities, including those in quasi-government sector. While in Government Medical Colleges the annual fee is INR 25000, the capitation fee in private medical colleges range from INR 750000 to INR 2000000; multiples of 300 to 800. The capitation fee is appreciated as one of the major contributors to corruption in education and society. Those who paid it look for a "return on investment" and it fuel unethical practices. It is one of the reasons for high healthcare costs and declining medical standards<sup>9</sup>.

NEET is publically opposed on the ground of favoring students who had schooling with Central board of secondary education (CBSE) syllabus in English, while supremacy of it over various state syllabi in vernacular is not yet established in producing a good doctor. Cautions were there against mushrooming coaching centers forming an obstacle before rural and socio-culturally underprivileged students<sup>10</sup>.

Medical education in India, especially in Private sector rapidly progressed in last 25 years. Out of current 462 Medical colleges, 249(53.89%) are in private sector while only 213 colleges (46.10%) are in Government sector<sup>11</sup> (MCI 2016). Strict implementation of MCI norms was proposed to ensure standard and improve the health care system of India<sup>11</sup>. Though council was unanimous to recommend amendment to make NEET mandatory, it didn't take note of the proposal to strengthen the implementation of it.

The highest rate of responses was from MCI members. The responses from other two groups were noticeably few. It could be appreciated that as a group the members of the Regulatory body demonstrated their sense of responsibility. The IMA being a professional body is concerned about the wellbeing of its member doctors, probably would have taken a stand not to comment on selection of students. A few of them might be beneficiary of

capitation fee admissions in the past. The low number of responses of College Principals was noteworthy. They might have no freedom to express against the interests of management or might be colluding with them, concealing the truth. In a matter basically of academics that observation was unfortunate.

It was not sure how colleges could admit students outside NEET in spite of verdict by Apex Court in the country. There was indifference from the political and bureaucratic executive for its effective implementation in this era of judicial dynamism, further follow-up actions from the court of law is yet come. Perhaps in some of the states out of 29 in the country, the State Governments might be conducting their own tests and didn't comply with court order. In some places College managements form consortium and conduct examinations which were not beyond doubts. There were media reports in the past that managements leaked question papers to those who paid capitation fee. Even in colleges where NEET was the criteria, inter-se-merit was not adhered. A few students got admissions over and above those having better rank position in the list. A mere presence in the NEET rank list was used as a decoy to circumvent the merit. Restricting access to application form to a limited few was another strategy some of the managements adopted in previous years. That continued during current year too. There were instances of agitations or approaching court; alleging violation of fundamental right of colleges. Nowhere counter argued that it was only an arrangement of *a single window* for admissions to all the colleges in the country, like what is an ongoing practice for admissions to PG Degree courses conducted in various hospitals by National Board of Examinations(Dip NB). A supervisory mechanism existed only in a few states.

There was a fee hike for MBBS course. This may be a leveling off to realistic and actual, following stopping of below the table dealings. But if unchecked, this fee hike can be enormous and replace capitation fee, which really happened in some of the states. This will lead to reservation of Medical college admissions to only an affluent few. Majority of respondents observed that capitation fee could not be stopped completely with NEET during the current year.

It seems NEET is promising, but alone is not enough.

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