

9/12/05

College holds medical students to ransom

By Rukmini Shrinivasan/TNN

Mumbai: Students at Pravara Medical College, Loni, are in panic as the college has refused to allow them to appear for exams on December 13 unless they pay Rs 3 lakh. The college, which recently got 'deemed' status, can now fix its own fees.

Students who got admission to MBBS, BDS and physiotherapy courses at Pravara college in 2003-04, when it was still affiliated to Maharashtra University of Health Sciences (MUHS) which governs government and private medical colleges in the state, have been asked to pay up.

Students appeared for their first year MUHS exams in June 2004 and the BDS and physiotherapy students took their second-year exams in June 2005. The second year in MBBS is one-and-a-half years and students were due to take their exams on December 13. However, in 2004-'05, Pravara college got 'deemed status' and decided to revise its fee structure. Students had already filled their MUHS examination forms and MUHS had sent their admit cards to the college when the news arrived.

After a Supreme Court ruling that private colleges could fix their own fees, Pravara college fixed its fees for 2003-'04 at Rs 4 lakh. After students' agitations, the Bombay high court in an interim order asked students to pay 60% of the fees and students paid around Rs 2.4 lakh. Then, the state government's Shikshan Shulka Samiti had fixed the fees for 2003-'04 at Rs 82,500. Now, after getting deemed status, the college has fixed its fees

at Rs 2.15 lakh per year and asked students to pay up the difference in 'unpaid fees' for the period 2004-'05 and 2005-'06, close to Rs 3 lakh, by December 13.

The Parents Association of Medical Students had moved HC against the decision but their petition was not admitted. They are now contemplating moving the SC. PAMS will hold a meeting of students from Pravara college and their parents at Devraj Hall, opposite Manish Market, Dadar (W) at 7 pm on Friday.

"We are not doing anything illegal—we are following the court's orders," said Pravara Rural Medical College principal Dr K S Soodan. "We too don't want the students to suffer, but

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they can't attend college without paying fees. We are allowing them to pay in two instalments," he added. However, par-

ents said they were being made to pay the full sum at one go.

It's not only raising lakhs within a few days which is troubling the students. In a deemed college, students do not get a degree from the MUHS but from the college itself. Besides, students who do not get a degree from the MUHS cannot take MUHS' entrance test for post-graduate courses.

However, the college is not obliged to consult the students when they apply for deemed status; they only need the state government's and the UGC sanction. "So students have no inkling of what they're getting into when they take admission in the college," said one harried parent. "And when the college becomes deemed, they have no say in the matter," she added.