

'Docs, clinicians on a par in villages'

3 Yrs Of Training, But 'Legal Quacks' As Good As MBBS

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It's official. At the primary healthcare level, there is no difference in the performance of MBBS doctors with five-and-a-half years' training and non-physician clinicians with three-year training, called "legal quacks" by the Indian Medical Association (IMA).

A study in Chhattisgarh compared the performance of different types of clinical care providers at the primary care level. Following the government's decision to start three-year Bachelor of Rural Health Care (BRHC) courses to train clinicians for primary healthcare, especially in rural areas, a study was conducted by the Public Health Foundation of India, the National Health Systems Resource Centre and the State Health Systems Resource Centre in Chhattisgarh comparing MBBS graduates, the three-year trained non-physician clinicians or rural medical assistants (RMAs), ayurveda unani siddha and homeopathy (AYUSH) physicians.

India faces a shortage of six lakh doctors, felt more acutely in rural areas as two-thirds of all medical personnel are concentrated in urban areas. The health ministry proposed a three-year bachelor of rural medicine and surgery course to cope with the shortage.

The IMA objected to this saying it was "a frontal attack on the profession". However, the study findings suggest medical officers (MBBS graduates) and RMAs are equally competent to manage conditions commonly seen in primary care settings. AYUSH medical officers are less competent and paramedics the least competent. This was observed for infectious, chronic and maternal health conditions and for a range of patient types—infants, children, adults. These results hold even after taking into account various individual, facility and location characteristics. This relative performance was consistently found in all aspects of out-patient care—history taking, examination, investigation, diagnosis, prescription and home recommendations.