

In Navi Mumbai, a PG med seat costs 1.7cr

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Mumbai: A postgraduate radiology seat in a private medical college in Navi Mumbai has sold for Rs 1.7 crore. The capitation fee is a 40% increase over last year and indicates a shift in the preferences of medical students, with subjects like radiology and orthopaedics overtaking favourites like paediatrics and gynaecology. While the medical fraternity is shocked at the transaction, and also concerned about the quality of doctors emerging from such deals, it feels helpless in the face of private colleges' autonomy.

Doctors said the sale, along with another of Rs 1.3 crore, indicated a trend that medical students want to earn a quick buck—a radiologist starts in practice with earnings ranging from Rs 1-15 lakh a month, depending on the location of his or her diagnostic centre, equipment and clientele.

Also, demand clearly outstrips supply by a huge number.

HIGH DEMAND, HIGH PRICE

- The Rs 1.7-crore seat was for radiology, which, along with orthopaedics and gynaecology, has been in demand in recent years
- Demand clearly outstrips supply. There are only 22 seats for radiology in govt medical colleges and around 10 in private colleges in the Mumbai-Navi Mumbai belt
- Orthopaedics and gynaecology seats in govt colleges number 36 and 26 only
- A radiologist in the city could easily earn Rs 1-15 lakh a month, depending on his location and clientele **Dearth of govt seats a boon for pvt colleges**

Mumbai: In the Mumbai-Navi Mumbai belt, there are just 22 radiology seats in government medical colleges and half that in private colleges for thousands of aspirants. In orthopaedics and gynaecology, the numbers of government seats are 36 and 26.

The scarcity is pervasive, with over 10,000 postgraduate aspirants fighting for little over 1,100 government seats across the state. Of these, only 250 seats belong to trendy subjects. "The dearth of postgraduate government seats is mainly to blame for seat sale by private colleges," said Dr Farhan Hamid, general secretary, Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors. Pravin Shingare of the Directorate of Medical Education and Research (DMER) denied knowledge of the seat sale. Nevertheless, he said the demand for private seats had skyrocketed because of a dearth of government seats. "Government colleges are losing out on postgraduate seats for want of teachers (a decade ago, the state had 1,900 postgraduate seats). We are looking at the problem."

He said subjects like radiology and orthopaedics were the most preferred because "medical practice today is strictly evidence-based as opposed to being clinical-based till a few years ago".

Kishor Taori, a former president of the All India Radiological and Imaging Association, said radiology is the youngest branch of medicine and also the most advanced. "Radiology has gone to the level of becoming an industry. Today, several radiologists are coming together to start their own diagnostic centres to compete with corporate hospitals."

A doctor said that with interventional radiology replacing many conventional surgical approaches, radiologists could soon become primary clinicians.

Over the years, subjects like general medicine and surgery have gone down the ladder of preferences also because these branches need further specialization for doctors to make the most of them. It all came to a head recently, when a student of anaesthesiology at the civicrun Sion Hospital committed suicide after failing to get a seat in paediatrics.

“The competition is more ruthless when it comes to super-specialty seats,” said a senior state official. Medical students say the price tag of private seats in courses like neurology, gastroenterology, cardiology and nephrology is as much as Rs 2 crore.

To curb this grey area in medical education, a single entrance test can go a long way, said Dr KS Sharma, a member of the board of governors of the Medical Council of India (MCI). “Donations could be a reality, but as regulators, there is little we can do. The commercial exploitation of medical education is a fallout of awarding private licences or deemed university status to several colleges. They are autonomous and have their own strategies.”

Medical college professors say it is high time the government stopped the sale of seats. A senior professor from JJ Hospital said: “It is scary to think of the means a doctor would adopt to recover the donation amount from society.”