

STATE INSTITUTES LOSING PG SEATS FOR WANT OF TEACHERS

The Emerging Pattern Of Medical Education In Maharashtra Spells Difficult Times Ahead For Aspirants And Patients Alike

Sumitra Deb Roy | TNN

Aspiring doctors say one must take a deeper look at the curious case of vanishing postgraduate medical seats in the state's government colleges at a time seats in private and deemed colleges have been steadily rising.

The number of government postgraduate seats in 2001 was 1,900, but in 2008 had come down to 750 because of a shortage of teachers. Ad-hoc appointments to fill the vacancies resulted in a seat increase to about 1,100. Still, 40% of teaching posts in 14 state medical colleges remain vacant.

Pravin Shingare of the Directorate of Medical Education said: "We are trying to fill the vacancies, which occurred in the first place partly because of an exodus of professors to private medical colleges and also because many retired. Not to mention that the private colleges increased their seats as a result."

He said the state government hoped the situation to improve in its colleges after its recent decision to increase the retirement age of teachers to 65 years.

A senior professor at the BYL Nair Hospital said the increase in the number of seats in private colleges and deemed universities is becoming the bane of medical education. "These colleges are putting their seats on the block. Each seat sells for an astounding amount. Recently, a few senior professors from the Nair and KEM hospitals were approached by a private medical college with the offer of a share in the proceeds. After all, these colleges have been able to increase seats only because professors are joining them. One professor means two PG seats."

He said a decision in 2001 to halve the teacher-student ratio for postgraduate seats from 1:2 to 1:1 resulted in the rapid reduction of seats in government colleges. But though the 1:2 arrangement has now been restored, the number of seats is yet to touch the 2001 level.

In the last two years, government seats have been at the 900-1100 level. This is not enough to keep pace with demand: postgraduate aspirants keep adding up over the years. This year, 4,000, or more than 95% of, MBBS degree holders have applied for masters. In addition, there are students making a second or third attempt.

A member of the Maharashtra Medical Teachers' Association said

that time-bound promotions and quick hiring can fill the vacuum of professors at the middle and senior level. "More professors would mean more postgraduate seats. The pressure on existing postgraduate students, who work as resident doctors, is enormous. Therefore, more seats is the need of the hour." **THE ECONOMICS OF RADIOLOGY**

Industry insiders say radiologists do not need massive capital to start a diagnostic setup. Manufacturers, rather than selling equipment, take away a chunk of the profit in lieu of installation for free. At certain centres, as much as 75% of the profit goes to the manufacturer for the first two years. An emerging trend is groups of radiologists coming together to start their own centres and giving corporate hospitals a run for their money.

The commonest equipment are high-end CT scanners, and MRI and sonography machines, which cost from Rs 1.5 crore to Rs 7 crore.

Some radiologists start small centres with basic sonography and X-ray machines that cost as little as Rs 15 lakh.

The cutthroat competition among the manufacturers has meant a rapid fall in equipment cost.

TimesView

The public healthcare system is facing a challenge regarding systems and standards like never before. The shortage of teachers has led to a situation where there are not enough postgraduate seats in government medical colleges. This has been exploited by private players, who think in terms of profit and not propriety. The government needs to intervene before the system spirals out of control. The need of the hour is good teachers, time-bound promotions for them and proper infrastructure. The state also needs to crack down on the sale of medical seats, which lowers the quality of doctors, thus putting patients' lives at risk.

