

Medical Education in this Era of COVID 19 : Dilemma for students

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Winter has just started and till now, number of COVID positive patients in India is already more than ninety three lakh, with more than one lakh thirty five thousand deaths. After thorough discussion, Government of India and National Medical Commission (NMC) have finally decided to open Medical Colleges in India, on or before 1 December 2020. The basic premise of this decision is the repercussions on the Medical Education Sector, if Medical Colleges don't open soon, as well as the limited availability of MBBS doctors in future. But, this decision has put MBBS students in dilemma. On one hand, their career is at stake, if they don't join Medical Colleges after 1 December 2020. But, on other hand, they face Health Hazard, due to COVID 19 Pandemic. And added to this, is their parent's fear and apprehensions, to send back MBBS students from safe environment of their homes, to hostel environment, where risk of COVID outbreaks is high.

NMC considered following points during discussion to open Medical Colleges :

1. The Intern batch of 2020 will not be eligible for appearing for the Post Graduate (PG) National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) examination, if they have not completed their required clinical training.
2. As the eligible candidates (Interns) will be completing their training late (delayed by few months), hence PG-NEET exam for the academic year 2021-22 may be delayed.
3. The unwarranted delay in resuming the MBBS training will have a cascading effect in the coming years, on the training of next PG and Super-specialty courses.
4. In the Academic year 2020-21, the academic session for MBBS students has been delayed by 4 months. As Undergraduate (UG) counselling has started, it is desirable that the new MBBS session should start, as soon as possible.
5. COVID 19 has provided MBBS students a unique opportunity to learn the skills of Epidemic management, as a public health professional. MBBS students (future doctors) should be familiar with the inherent risks and opportunities in health care system, and this would eventually help them in handling situation like COVID 19 Pandemic in future.
6. There is potential of null year for the academic session 2021-22, if there is delay in reopening of Medical Colleges, and this will result in non-availability of 80,000 doctors, five years later.

The decisions taken finally by NMC, in regard to opening of Medical Colleges are as follows :

1. Medical Colleges in India should open across India, on or before 1 December 2020 for MBBS students, who are already pursuing their course.
2. New Academic session for MBBS students in 2020-21 has already been delayed and now, this MBBS session should commence from 1st February 2021.
3. The new PG session for academic session 2020-21 should begin from atleast 1 July 2021, and this can only be possible, if PG-NEET exam for Academic year 2020-21 is scheduled around March-April 2021.
4. Many teaching hospitals have been converted to complete COVID Hospitals in several states in India. To facilitate UG training, facilities need to be restarted for both outpatient and inpatient management for non-COVID patients, with sufficient number of beds for non-COVID patients.

NMC further requested Central Government regarding same, and thereafter Union Health Ministry obtained concurrence from Ministry of Home Affairs for re-opening of Medical Colleges. The Centre also asked States/Union Territories to ensure that all SOP/guidelines with respect to social distancing and prevention of the spread of epidemic, issued by Central/State/Union Territories Governments, will be followed in letter and spirit, scrupulously by all the Medical Colleges.