

Doctors Against 1-yr Compulsory Rural Service

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Bangalore: A group of students from across the country, along with some doctors of the city, came together to start the 'Save the Doctor' campaign.

They alleged that one year of rural posting after MBBS has worsened things for medical students who are already inconvenienced by the shortage of postgraduate seats. They suggested alternatives like making rural service a part of the existing undergraduate and postgraduate courses. They also demanded equal number of seats at both levels.

"There are 45,600 MBBS seats in colleges across the country. But there are only 12,000 PG seats in the most preferred clinical courses. Fresh graduates compete along with those who have been preparing for several years for these seats. This situation will worsen once rural posting is made compulsory," said Ankit Doshi, a student of Baroda Medical College, Baroda, at a news conference held here on Monday.

The only way out of this is to increase the number of PG seats and make it equal to the UG seats, he contended.

Dr Navneet Motreja, coordinator of the campaign, claimed that two to three lakh medical students from across the country are expected to participate in it.

Ayushi, a student, said: "The safety of girl students will be compromised if they are made to work in rural areas. It will also result in brain drain where in many students will move abroad

resulting in brain drain."

Dr Narendra Saini, Secretary General, Indian Medical Association (IMA), said: "If six months of rural posting is included in the three month PG programmes, PG students will willingly go as they have the knowledge and the confidence that they are pursuing a PG course."

He also suggested that paramedical students could also follow the same.

Highlighting these suggestions in a letter to the Union Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, another solution the participants suggested was that doctors practising in all government and private hospitals must work in a rural location for one year every time they get promoted. "The government must ensure that it provides the doctors with proper infrastructure like operation theatres, laboratories, medicines, and incentives in rural areas," Dr Saini said.

Comparing the number of PG seats available in institutes in India and US, Dr Devi Shetty, chairman, Narayana Hrudayalaya, said that while there are 376 seats in India for psychiatry as opposed to 1,360 in the US.

The Association of Healthcare Providers of India (AHPI) and IMA have also extended their support to this campaign.

Health Minister UT Khader said that the government is spending ₹25-30 lakh in producing each doctor. "If we send MBBS students on internship, the rural folks will be at risk. Doctors should stop thinking only about themselves and also consider the society."