

# Centre plans 6.5-year MBBS

## To Make 1-Yr Rural Stint Mandatory

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** India is planning to make its undergraduate MBBS course six-and-a-half years long, instead of the present five-and-a-half years.

In a meeting on Saturday, health minister Ghulam Nabi Azad and the Medical Council of India (MCI) discussed amending the MCI Act that would make a one-year rural posting compulsory for all MBBS students before they can become doctors. The proposal was first mooted by former health minister A Ramadoss in 2007.

Speaking to TOI, MCI chairman Dr K K Talwar said, "It is not that we have cleared the proposal. This was discussed on Saturday. In another two weeks time, we will prepare a module on how we can make MBBS doctors go and work in rural areas. The ministry will then take a call."

Dr Talwar, however, cautioned, "We haven't yet decided to introduce the six-and-a-half year MBBS course from next year. The proposal is still in planning stages now." According to Dr Talwar, if the proposal is cleared, India's 40,000 students will be utilized for a year in the National Rural Health Mission.

"Medicine is a long career. One year of rural posting, in which students will be exposed to unique cases and diseases, will only do them good. However, the students will not be paid as interns but as doctors during that extra year of rural posting," Dr Talwar said.

India is facing an acute shortage of human resources in health

— the sting of which is being faced by the flagship NRHM scheme, and the vulnerable population in rural, tribal and hilly areas is extremely underserved.

In 2006, only 26% of doctors in India lived in rural areas, serving 72% of the population. A study found that the urban density of doctors was about four times that in rural areas, and that of nurses about three times higher. As of March, 2010, undue delays in recruitments resulted in vacancies even in available posts at health centres.

Over 34% of male health workers, 38% of radiographers, 16% of laboratory technicians, 31% of specialists, 20% of pharmacists and 17% of ANMs and 10% of doctors' posts were lying vacant. As per a Planning Commission study, the country is short of six lakh doctors, 10 lakh nurses and 2 lakh dental surgeons, leading to a dismal doctor-patient ratio.

An earlier ministry report had pointed out while only 6.3% of the posts for doctors were vacant on paper, a staggering 67% of them played truant. The ministry had earlier given incentives to MBBS students if they worked in rural areas for a year. It had said working in rural India could stand MBBS students a better chance of getting a post-graduate medical seat. According to the incentive, MBBS doctors who underwent rural service would sit for the PG exam with an added advantage — they would have 10-30 marks guaranteed. "However none of these incentives have paid dividends till now," said Dr Talwar.



**MCI said the proposal is still in the planning stage, But if approved, the govt will utilize the 40,000 students for a year in the National Rural Health Mission to overcome shortage of doctors**