

EDITORIAL

RAPID CHANGES ARE DELETERIOUS FOR HEALTH PROFESSION

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ثبات ایک تغیر کو ہے زمانے میں (اقبال)

(The only permanent thing in this universe is 'change'. Iqbal)

Changes are introduced for improvement. Changes cannot be accepted if the sole strategy is to mandate solutions from the top down and there is multiplicity of existing policies. Entry test was started to counter cheating in the FSc examinations. This year syllabus and format for this test and its percentage in merit calculation was changed many times. National Licensing Examination (NLE) is also imposed on students after passing MBBS course. There is no uniform teaching or assessment methodology for MBBS. PMC allowed non-medical faculty to be inducted in medical colleges; it recently denied registering postgraduate qualifications of Basic Medical Sciences. PMDC was dissolved and PMC was constituted many times. No one is looking at the big picture and the health system as a whole. Results of this total bewilderment will be obvious in a few years' time. After these rapid changes, situation will be disastrous for the medical profession in the country.

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No doubt, changes in any system are introduced for improvement. Changes in medical profession are stimulated by medical progress. Change is accepted if they benefit the public, if new models of care emerge, if clinical practices are altered by necessity or if they reach professional acceptance. Changes cannot be accepted if opposed by main stakeholders, if the sole strategy is to mandate solutions from the top down, if there is multiplicity of existing policies and if they attempt to alter deep seated politics or cultures.¹ In Pakistan, during the last few years, changes in each component of health profession are so rapid that they create confusion and a sense of insecurity among students, faculty, and health institutions regulators. Each component is discussed as under:

STUDENTS

Entry Test was introduced in 1996 initially in the then NWFP, and later in 1998 in the whole country after decision of the Supreme Court of Pakistan on Hina Javed and others vs Government of NWFP case to counter cheating in the FSc examinations. From 1998 to 2007, it has been conducted at the provincial level. Since 2008, University of Health Sciences, Lahore conducted this test in Punjab. Now, in 2020, it is assigned to the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) at the national level. Syllabus and format for this test and its percentage in merit calculation was also changed many times. Students are confused about it. This time, it is a national level Entry Test in spite of the fact that there is no uniform syllabus nationally. This rapidly changing situation caused confusion among students. Entry Test is also belated this year and as a result there will be shortage of House Officers after five years as this important work force for hospitals will not be available timely. It has been pointed out that the entry test has failed to

achieve its goal of selecting better students for medical colleges.²

Standard and integrity at the level of Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) has much improved during the past few years, so the Entry Test may be waived off now. Further insult to the injury is proposed National Licensing Examination (NLE) which is imposed on students after passing MBBS course. NLE for foreign medical graduates have some logic, but for national graduates it is simply a no-confidence on our own national health system. Steps like Entry Test and NLE are taken as temporary measures to mend our basic systems and they should not be imposed permanently.

Let us see how many exams a doctor passes during his professional life: 1. Entry Test to get admission to MBBS; 2. Five university Examinations (usually called 'Profs') to pass MBBS; 3. A Public Service exam to become a Medical Officer (MO); 4. At least two more exams to get a degree of M.Phil or FCPS; 5. Another Public Service Commission exam to become a medical teacher (Assistant Professor). 5. For his/her rapid promotion, another exam to become Associate Professor and still another exam to become a Professor. Now another exam is proposed, i.e., NLE! Consider the life of a doctor as a human being; he has family life responsibilities, social and religious responsibilities which need his/her attention. It is a fact that doctors marry late because they are busy in their career building. Just a few years ago, our doctors were the most sought-after doctors throughout the world but only a few years after these rapid changes, situation will be disastrous for the medical profession in the country.

After the inception of PMC, fee structure in private medical colleges is uncontrolled and yearly fee, without hostel fee, is now about PKR 1.5 million. This

will be increased 7% each year. PMC also allowed non-medical faculty to teach Basic Medical Sciences in medical colleges. This simply means that future doctors will be taught by non-doctors!

TEACHING METHODOLOGY & ASSESSMENT

There is no uniform teaching methodology and method of assessment for MBBS students throughout Pakistan. Some medical colleges follow the integrated curriculum and majority of others follow the traditional curriculum. Although traditional curriculum of University of Health Sciences (UHS), Lahore is of integrated type and Basic Medical Sciences teachers are doctors who can easily do horizontal as well as vertical integration, the method of assessment is different in some medical colleges affiliated with UHS.

FACULTY

After inception of PMC, there will be two controlling authorities for Medical Colleges: PMC and the HEC. Clinical Sciences faculty will be registered with PMC and Basic Sciences faculty will be registered with HEC. PMC also allowed non-medical faculty to be inducted in medical colleges which will create disharmony in Basic Medical Science teachers. It should be noted that this was disallowed by PMDC after a long debate and experience of many decades. The decision of allowing non-medical teachers will damage the medical education system. Medical students like to be taught by doctors rather than by non-doctors. It is just like going to square one again, and re-inventing the wheel. Remember that it was the strength of our medical education system and not the weakness.

PMC recently denied to register postgraduate qualifications of Basic Medical Sciences teachers and referred them to Higher Education Commission (HEC) to be registered. HEC has no experience about medical education. There is no medical education wing and no arrangements for registration of these degrees. In fact, Basic Medical Science teachers have to apply to two authorities for registration of their qualifications; for MBBS they have to apply to PMC, and for MPhil or

PhD to HEC. They have to bear extra burden as paper work and payment of additional fees to two different authorities. A situation of panic is created for Basic Medical Science teachers.

PMC vs PMDC and HEC

During the last few years, PMDC was dissolved and PMC was constituted multiple times. In October 2019, the PMDC was dissolved first time and replaced with the Pakistan Medical Commission (PMC) when President Dr. Arif Alvi signed the Pakistan Medical Commission Ordinance 2019. On 11th February 2020, the Islamabad High Court nullified the Pakistan Medical Commission Ordinance and restored PMDC.³ On 16 September 2020, PMDC was dissolved again by a joint session of the Senate and Parliament by passing the bill to replace PMDC by PMC to ensure standard medical education in Pakistan. At present, although PMC is in place, its constitution is being challenged at various fora, and that is creating a total confusion among the medical fraternity.

HEC has no know-how about professional and technical education like medical and engineering etc. The HEC still seems to be reluctant to accept this tedious task. There is no medical education wing and no arrangements for registration of these degrees awarded by its own universities.

There is a situation of total chaos in every component of health profession. Nobody is looking at the big picture and the health system as a whole. Results of this total bewilderment will appear after some time and no one will take responsibility of this total disaster.

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