

1 govt medical college seat for 55k people

Massive Shortage Of Seats Allows Private Sector To Jack Up The Cost of Education

Rema Nagarajan | TNN

The shortage of doctors in India can be blamed on the government neglecting medical education for three decades from 1970 till 2000. In a 15-year period from 1951 to 1966, sustained investment in medical education led to India having one medical seat in a government college for roughly every 37,000 persons, down from one for every 71,000 in 1951. Over the 47 years since then, the situation has worsened dramatically with one government medical college seat for over 55,000 today.

This has resulted in the private sector taking over medical education in a big way. That, in turn, has meant spiralling costs, question marks over quality and a sharp geographical skew.

Even with the private sector included, India now has one MBBS seat for every 26,042 people, only a small improvement from one for every 33,521 in 1966. In contrast, the period from 1951 to 1966 had seen the ratio cut by more than half.

A look at the data on medical seats and colleges available with the Medical Council of India (MCI), the regulator for medical education and doctors, shows that the availability of medical seats has improved in recent

IN ILL HEALTH

GOVT MEDICAL SEAT TO POPULATION RATIO

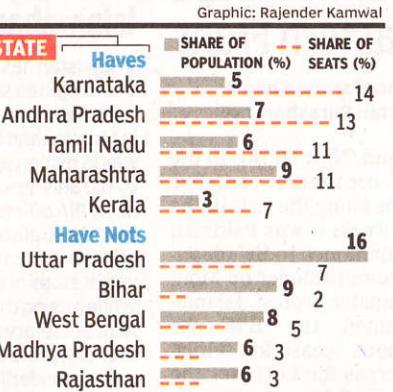


47%

of current available medical seats were created since 2000

72%

of all medical seats added since 1970 are in private sector



COST

Private MBBS course

₹15-40L

► 50% of pvt sector seats in just 4 states: Karnataka, TN, AP and Kerala

Govt MBBS course

₹10,000-1.5L

► In 2013, govt created 1,300 seats through 14 new colleges adding 3,013 to existing colleges -double the figure for 1970-2000

years. Almost half (47%) of the currently available medical seats have been created since 2000. However, over 72% of the seats added since 1970 are in the private sector.

Why should this be a matter of concern? There are several good reasons for this to be a cause for worry. For starters, private medical education is hugely expensive making it inaccessible for most Indians. In private

colleges, the cost of graduating is Rs 15 lakh-40 lakh or more, not including capitation fees. In a government college, it ranges from a mere Rs 10,000 as tuition fee in Delhi's Maulana Azad Medical College for the entire MBBS course to about Rs 1.5 lakh in Trivandrum Medical College.

The quality of education in private medical colleges too has been a matter of great concern as they are less transpar-

ent and have proved difficult to regulate. The fact that many are owned by political heavyweights does not help.

The private sector has also led to a geographical skew in the distribution of seats. Over half the private sector seats are concentrated in just four states—Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, though they account for just 21% of India's population. In Karnataka, for every gov-

ernment seat, there are almost four private medical seats, while in Kerala there are two private seats for every government medical seat. However, in the poorer states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Assam, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and in the North Eastern states, medical education remains largely dependent on government medical colleges. In most of these states, no new government medical colleges were created for decades between the 1960s and 2000.

In over two decades following Independence, the government created 69 medical colleges with over 8,500 seats. This was followed by three decades (1970-99) of utter neglect, when the population almost doubled from 548 million to over a billion, while the government added barely 2,000 more medical seats. The surge of the private sector started in the 80s as government investment in medical education declined drastically, but it has accelerated since the turn of the century.

After the government woke up to the crisis in medical education and took steps to increase government investment and also relaxed the norms for running a medical college, there has been a surge in the number of

medical colleges, both public and private, especially in the last three years.

A former member of the Board of Governors of the MCI, Dr Ranjit Roychoudhury, had this to say: "We lost three decades starting from the 70s. The government stepped back from medical education thinking that the private sector would be able to fill in. At the time, the problems of private medical education were not envisaged. We are now trying to rectify this problem."

Since 2000, the government has created over 9,300 medical seats, almost as many as it did in half a century from 1950 till 2000. But the 9,300 seems a pittance compared to the 17,700-plus private sector seats created in the same period. Almost 60% of the latter were in the four southern states. In 2013, for the first time since 1975, the government has created more medical seats than the private sector. This year, the government has created 1,300 seats through 14 new medical colleges. Another 3,013 have been added to existing colleges. Thus, in just this half-completed year, the government has created twice as many seats as it did in 30 years from 1970 to 2000.

Is the trend changing for the better? Let's hope so.