Reduction In The Required Number Of Faculty Of Forensic Medicine In Medical Colleges Of India

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My opinion

1. Introduction: Medical Council of India (MCI) has the responsibility of maintain the standards of medical education in the country. Several amendments have been suggested and implemented, based on the need, for the existing regulations regarding the medical education. This article refers to the amendments by the MCI, dated 17th September 2010, which have allowed the reduction of the minimum number of faculty, in the department of forensic medicine in the medical colleges which are teaching MBBS. The reduction of required faculty of forensic medicine has been reduced across all the categories (based on intake of students) of medical colleges. Majority of the medical colleges are admitting either 100 students or 150 students per year. The reduction of the forensic medicine faculty in medical colleges by these amendments have therefore going to staff the department with only 2 (100 MBBS admissions/year) or 3 forensic medicine experts (150 MBBS admissions/year), when compared to higher numbers in the earlier years.

2. Importance of Forensic medicine:
Forensic medicine is an important branch of medicine, which provides scientific evidence in the administration of justice. Judiciary relies on medical evidence more than ever before, especially if that evidence is provided by the expert in forensic medicine.

3. Duties of a faculty of forensic medicine: The duties of forensic medicine faculty of a medical college, in addition to teaching by lectures and other methods, includes conducting medico-legal autopsies, attending judicial court duties, medico-legal cases in hospital and others (research, expert opinions, training to judiciary and police, additional institutional work such as administration, etc.).

4. Adverse effects due to the reduction in the number of faculty:
4.1. Inconvenience due to work overload: Imagine a scenario in a medical college (100 admissions) with only 2 forensic medicine staff (as per the amendment of 17th September 210): only one of these staff member will be working on several of the days, because the other one might be on a court’s duty (forensic medicine doctors are called to courts very often), vacation, or has availed other types of leave, the department will be left with only one faculty member to carry out the duties; there is every chance of causing justifiable inconvenience to the public, by delaying the autopsies.
4.2.1. Decline in the Quality of Medical Education: Apart from causing inconvenience to the public who are eagerly awaiting the speedy disposal of dead body, there are other fallouts of these amendments such as the issue of excessive work load and constraints in dealing with other duties, and resulting in decline in the quality of medical education.
4.2.2. Indian scenario: A medical practitioner (MBBS) of India is expected to perform autopsies, issue medico-legal reports, and know about poisons, ethics and so on, all of which is tightly scheduled in the MBBS curriculum, and is being taught in the department of forensic medicine. Considering medico-legal autopsies, in India, with less than 20% of the total autopsy reports being written by forensic medical experts, the majority of the work is carried out by other doctors, mainly by MBBS Doctors in the government hospitals. This mandates that our training of MBBS doctor should be intensive and cover all the medico legal issues and make them competent enough to use it in future. With the amendment which could bring down the number of autopsies conducted in the medical college hospital, the sufferer would be the society at large, and autopsy services in particular; the MBBS students will be unable to get proper training due to lack of practical exposure. So many of the future MBBS doctors might be relatively incompetent and therefore, unable to serve the society by assisting the judicial system in criminal investigations; the result may be disastrous- the miscarriage of justice. This issue is relevant, when we consider the views by eminent members such as Justice Venkatachalaiah, that there is a need to give better training in Forensic Medicine to medical graduates.
4.3. No takers of Post graduate course in Forensic Medicine: This amendment reduces the job prospects of any aspiring candidate to pursue forensic medicine as career. Unlike many other subjects, Forensic medicine graduate has to be attached to a medical college. When the teaching staff posts are reduced there will be very few takers of this postgraduate course. Although there are reportage about the
shortage of faculty of forensic medicine (many would not like to pursue this career with a ‘stigma’), several graduates are getting trained in forensic medicine to join this service oriented profession; such youngsters should be encouraged by better job opportunities and facilities, so that the justice system in our country gets better than ever before.

5. **Suggestions:** The minimum number of faculty, required in the department of forensic medicine, should be reconsidered by the MCI. The training of forensic medicine in the MBBS curriculum should be made more efficient and useful. Every step should be taken towards ensuring the quality of medico-legal work; this could be achieved by increasing the number of available forensic medicine experts.

**Conclusion**

MCI’s ill conceived perception about Forensic Medicine requires to be set right by simply convincing them that the subject is a felt need, not something avoidable being thrust upon the MBBS students.

**Abbreviation(s)**

MCI=Medical Council of India
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