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Medical education quality in Bangladesh dips due to shortage of teachers, facilities

Mohiuddin Alamgir and Ahmed Shatil Alam | Updated at 01:39am on June 03, 2018



The quality of medical education is getting compromised at medical colleges in Bangladesh due to inadequate hospital facilities and shortage of teachers, libraries and labs. No matter how incredible it sounds, many medical colleges have none to teach physiology, biochemistry, pharmacology, pathology, microbiology, community medicine and anatomy, eight basic subjects for the MBBS students.

Medical students told New Age that they were facing the problems at government run as well as private medical colleges.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services about 50 per cent positions of professors, associate professors and assistant professors are currently vacant at government run medical colleges and specialized post graduate institutes.

And private medical colleges are being run with less than 50 per cent of teaching staff, said, Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council and Dhaka University officials.

Students accused the authorities of neglecting or relegating medical education to lower importance by not recruiting the needed teachers.

Health experts and senior doctors said that sponsors' profit motive private medical colleges were failing to provide quality education to their students.

They said that the compromised medical education quality already left a 'negative impact' on the nation's health service.

Former Bangladesh Medical Association president Rashid-E-Mahbub and Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder Zafrullah Chowdhury feel that the medical education quality was in jeopardy.

Health minister Mohammad Nasim admitted that being aware about the issue he was trying to solve teacher shortage.

He said that he feels that the number of medical colleges should be fewer than they were.

'We think the number of medical colleges is more than what we need,' he told New Age.

He also said that medical graduates lost the interest to become teachers.

DGHS officials said that 105 medical colleges had enrolled 52,000 students in 2017.

They said that now 36 government run medical colleges had about 3,000 teachers while 69 private medical colleges about 6,500 teachers.

During the Awami League-led government's two tenures since 2009, 47 new medical colleges were opened in the country.

The government's Health Bulletin 2017 posted on the DGHS website in March shows that 51 per cent of the 621 sanctioned posts of professors at medical and dental colleges and institutions run by the government were lying vacant.

And, 45 per cent of 1,005 posts of associate professors and 50 per cent of 1,550 posts of assistant professors were also lying vacant.

Some of the government run medical colleges have no teacher for taking classes in some of the eight basic subjects for the MBBS students.

Government run Cox's Bazar Medical College, Patuakhali Medical College and Sheikh Hasina Medical College at Jamalpur have no teacher to teach some of the basic subjects to their MBBS students.

Patukahali Medical College has not a single teacher at its eight departments including pharmacology, said principal Mahmudur Rahman.

He told New age that due to teacher shortage 'I can't even provide two internal invigilators during examinations.'

'Obviously, I try to bring invigilators from the other medical colleges, but no one wants to come to remote Patuakhali,' he said.

Cox's Bazaar Medical College has no forensic medicine and anatomy teacher at all though both are basic subjects for the MBBS students.

Principal Subhas Chandra Saha said that he had to request teachers of the other departments to take forensic medicine and anatomy classes though what they teach proves not enough for the students.

The Sheikh Hasina Medical College at Jamalpur has no forensic medicine teacher, said principal Abdul Wakil.

Besides, he said, orthopedic and some other clinical departments also have no teacher.

The principal feels that shortage of teachers put students' academic life at the Sheikh Hasina medical College in 'seriously jeopardy'.

The teachers and health experts said that the teacher shortage was 'more acute' at the private medical colleges.

Insufficient hospital and research facilities are additional problems for the private medical colleges, they said.

The other issues afflicting private medical colleges are shortage of dormitories, libraries and absence of playgrounds and other co-curricular facilities, said DU college inspection office.

DU faculty of medicine monitors 42 out of the country's 69 private medical colleges.

A senior DU official said during inspections they found that most of the private medical colleges did not have the needed class rooms and attached hospitals, though medical colleges are called teaching hospitals.

'Despite our repeated warnings, they don't even care to implement our recommendations as some of the medical colleges were founded by politically powerful persons,' he said.

Students of many private medical colleges including Shahbuddin Medical College, Marks Medical College, Dhaka Central International Medical College told New Age that they find no labs for their anatomy and other classes.

In September 2017, the government asked five private medical colleges located on small plot having no academic building and conference room and lacking teachers to stop enrolling students.

The embargo on student enrollments were imposed on Shahabuddin Medical College, Ad-din Bashundhara Medical College, Aichi Medical College, Care Medical College and Northern International Medical College.

Health ministry officials said that except for the Aichi Medical College, the four other medical colleges were later allowed to enroll students following orders from the High Court Division.

On the same grounds, they said, in 2014 bans on student enrollments were imposed on 12 private medical colleges but the bans were stayed by the High Court Division later in the

year.

'We repeatedly ask them to maintain quality of medical education and follow the rules, but they don't pay heed,' said BMDC registrar Zahedul Haque Basunia.

Rashid-E-Mahbub, a former surgery professor at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University criticized the government for providing permission to open so many private and public medical colleges without having any policy framework or strategy to create the needed teachers as well as the basic facilities for them.

Zafrullah Chowdhury said the 'mess' already created indicated that the country had no authority to monitor and regulate the vital medical education sector.

In March, while inaugurating the 3rd International Conference on Critical Care Medicine and the 1st National Conference on Critical Care Nursing in the capital, prime minister Sheikh Hasina asked private medical colleges to improve the standard of medical education.

Health minister Nasim told New Age that a system would be put in place to monitor private medical colleges.



Editor: **Nurul Kabir**, Published by the Chairman, Editorial Board ASM Shahidullah Khan on behalf of Media New Age Ltd. 30 Tejgaon Industrial Area, Dhaka-1208 Phone: 880-2-8170450-56 (PABX), Fax: 880-2-8170457

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