

Medical Practice Management

after MBBS

Knowledge of Medicine is not enough to Practice Medicine

Niranjan Shah

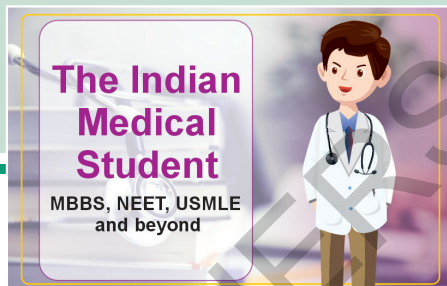


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“NExT 1 and 2”: Gateway for MBBS Graduates’ Further Career



INTRODUCTION

The National Medical Commission (NMC) India, formerly known as the Medical Council of India (MCI), has introduced a new set of qualifying examinations called “NExT 1 and 2” (National Exit Test) for MBBS graduates. These examinations serve as a mandatory requirement for medical graduates to pursue their further career in the field of medicine. In this blog, we will delve into the significance of NExT 1 and 2, its objectives, and how it impacts the careers of aspiring doctors in India.

UNDERSTANDING NExT 1 AND 2

The NExT is a two-part examination that aims to assess the competency of MBBS graduates in a standardized and comprehensive manner. The examinations are designed to evaluate their medical knowledge, clinical skills, and problem-solving abilities. Successful completion of NExT 1 and 2 is now a mandatory requirement for medical graduates to proceed with their postgraduation studies or medical practice in India. It is also meant to replace the existent FMGE—foreign medical graduate examination mandatory for students completing MBBS from foreign countries.

OBJECTIVES OF NExT 1 AND 2

The implementation of NExT 1 and 2 is driven by several objectives:

- **Ensuring quality healthcare:** By evaluating the skills and knowledge of medical graduates through a standardized test, NMC aims to ensure that only competent doctors enter the healthcare system, thereby improving the overall quality of healthcare services in India.
- **Streamlining postgraduation admissions:** NExT 1 is primarily focused on determining eligibility for postgraduation courses. By adopting a common entrance examination, the process of admission to various specializations becomes more organized and transparent. This will also be applicable for foreign MBBS graduates returning and wanting to enroll with NMC, India, replacing FMGE.
- **Assessing clinical skills for licensure:** NExT 2 is focused on assessing the practical clinical skills of doctors, ensuring that they are capable of providing safe and effective medical care. Upon successful completion, candidates will be eligible for medical licensure.
- **Bridging the urban-rural healthcare divide:** By raising the standards for medical practice, NMC aims to attract doctors to rural areas where there is a shortage of healthcare professionals.

IMPACT ON MBBS GRADUATES

- *Clearer path to postgraduation and licensure:* With NExT 1 and 2 becoming the gateway to postgraduation and licensure, MBBS graduates can now have a clearer path for their career progression. The examinations provide a standardized platform for all graduates, irrespective of their institution, to prove their mettle.
- *Encouraging continuous learning:* The introduction of NExT 1 and 2 has instilled a culture of continuous learning among medical students. The examinations require candidates to stay updated with medical advancements, enhancing their knowledge base.
- *Competitiveness and quality enhancement:* The examinations foster a competitive environment, leading to a rise in the overall quality of medical education and training in the country.

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

- *Transition period:* The introduction of NExT 1 and 2 marks a significant change in the medical education landscape. As with any major reform, there might be some initial challenges during the transition period.
- *Standardization:* Ensuring consistent and uniform administration of examinations across the vast number of medical institutions in India is a considerable undertaking.
- *Stress and pressure:* As the examinations carry great importance for the medical graduates' future, there may be increased stress and pressure on candidates during the preparation phase.

SUMMARY OF DRAFT GAZETTE ON NExT WITH DETAILS BY NATIONAL MEDICAL COMMISSION

The National Medical Commission (NMC) (website: <https://www.nmc.org.in/>) has released a draft outlining the NExT. NExT will serve two purposes:

1. *Licentiate examination:* It will be a mandatory requirement for all medical graduates (Indian and foreign) to practice modern medicine in India.
2. *PG entrance examination:* It will determine the eligibility and ranking for admission to postgraduate medical education courses in India.

The draft covers the following aspects of NExT:

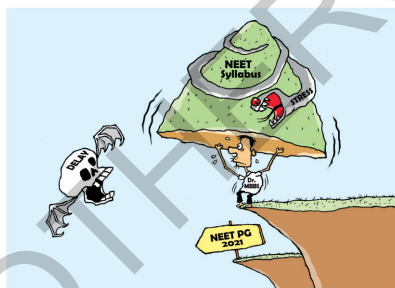
- *Objectives:* Establish a uniform standard for medical graduate education and training across India.
- *Eligibility:* All MBBS students in India, foreign medical graduates seeking to practice in India, and those pursuing medical observerships or other NMC-approved programs.
- *Test structure:* NExT will be a two-step examination:
 - *Step 1:* Theoretical computer-based MCQ examination covering six MBBS subjects.
 - Must be passed within 10 years of joining MBBS course
 - Regular examination held annually before final MBBS practical examinations
 - Supplementary examination offered annually for those failing one or more subjects
 - *Minimum passing score:* About 50% overall and in each subject
 - *Step 2:* Practical/clinical and viva voce examination covering seven clinical subjects.
 - Conducted by universities following NMC guidelines
 - Regular examination held annually
 - Supplementary examination offered annually for those failing up to three subjects
 - Pass/fail based on satisfactory demonstration of acquired competencies
- *NExT scores:*
 - *Step 1 score:* Sum of raw scores in each subject. Valid for 3 years for PG admissions
 - *Step 2 score:* Pass/fail only

- *Question distribution (step 1):* Designed to discourage rote memorization and emphasize critical thinking:
 - Problem-solving and analytical skills (clinical vignettes): 65%
 - Comprehension: 25%
 - Recall: 10%
- *Validity of previous examinations:* Upon NExT implementation, current equivalent examinations will be discontinued. Existing batches may be eligible for appearing in previously applicable examinations as decided by relevant authorities.

For more information, refer to the NMC website.

MY REFLECTIONS

National Medical Commission India’s “NExT 1 and 2” qualifying examinations are a step toward introducing significant changes to medical education and enhancing the quality of healthcare services in the country. By setting a common standard for all MBBS graduates in the country, NMC aims to ensure that only competent and skilled doctors enter the profession. The long-term benefits of this policy are likely to have a positive impact on the medical community, patients, and the overall healthcare ecosystem in India but need a careful watch all along as all stakeholders are not on the same page.



THE NEED FOR MORE SPECIALISTS AND SUPERSPECIALISTS IN INDIA

The Indian healthcare system faces a critical shortage of specialists (MD/MS/DNB) and superspecialists (DM/MCh) doctors, leading to inadequate access to specialized care for a growing population. While the number of MBBS graduates is increasing, the rate of postgraduate specialization remains insufficient to meet the burgeoning demand.

CURRENT STATISTICS

- *MBBS doctors:* As of March 31, 2017, there were 1,022,859 MBBS doctors registered in India (Source: Lok Sabha statement by Minister of State for Health).
- *Medical colleges:* India currently has 479 medical colleges with an annual intake of 67,218 MBBS students, with approximately 12,870 additional MBBS seats added in the past 3 years [Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)].
- *AYUSH doctors:* As of January 1, 2017, there were 773,668 registered AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy) graduates (Source: AYUSH Ministry).
- *Postgraduate specialization:* According to a 2016 World Health Organization (WHO) report, only 18% of allopathic doctors in India held a postgraduate degree (specialist degree) (Source: WHO report on the health workforce in India, 2016).

SPECIALIST AND SUPERSPECIALIST SHORTAGE

The shortage of specialists and superspecialists is particularly acute in key areas, creating significant gaps in healthcare services. Some stark examples include:

- *Cardiologists:* India has only 4,000 cardiologists, while the estimated requirement is 88,000 (Source: Various medical associations and reports).
- *Nephrologists:* India has only 1,200 nephrologists, while the country needs about 40,000 (Source: Indian Society of Nephrology).

- *Endocrinologists*: There are just about 650 endocrinology superspecialists against a requirement of nearly 28,000 (*Source*: Endocrine Society of India).
- *Medical oncologists*: In 2019, there were only 69 medical oncology seats available in India, while the number was just 14 annually until 2014 (*Source*: National Cancer Institute).
- *Pediatricians*: India has only around 23,000 pediatricians, whereas the required number is 230,000 (*Source*: Indian Academy of Pediatrics).

DATA LIMITATIONS

Unfortunately, neither the MoHFW nor the MCI publishes data on individual specialty and superspecialty doctor counts, making it difficult to provide a precise picture of the problem. However, based on available information, we can estimate that:

- *MBBS doctors*: Constitute the majority of registered medical practitioners
- *Specialists (MD/MS/DNB)*: Account for approximately 18% of MBBS doctors
- *Superspecialists (DM/MCh)*: Likely represent <5% of specialists

SPECIALTY DISTRIBUTION

Even within the specialist category, the distribution is uneven. Specialties like general medicine, pediatrics, gynecology, and general surgery have more doctors due to the higher prevalence of related diseases. Conversely, superspecialties have limited seats (1–4/semester) in select institutions, further restricting their availability.

CONCLUSION

While the Indian government has taken steps to increase MBBS seats and promote postgraduate specialization, the current efforts are insufficient to address the critical shortage of specialists and superspecialists. To ensure equitable access to quality healthcare, India needs a comprehensive strategy that focuses on increasing postgraduate training opportunities, incentivizing specialization in high-demand areas, and improving data collection and dissemination.

MAIN GUIDELINES IN NMC’S NEW PG MEDICAL ADMISSION REGULATIONS JANUARY 2024

- *Online counseling*: All PG medical admissions will be conducted online by state or central authorities, eliminating college-specific admissions.
- *Unified system*: A single counseling system based on merit lists from examinations will be used for all PG medical courses across India.
- *Transparency*: Medical colleges must declare fees for each course during seat matrix submission, or those seats will be excluded.
- *Examination changes*: Formative assessments and MCQs may be incorporated into university examinations for greater objectivity.
- *District residency*: The minimum bed requirement for DRP hospitals is reduced from 100 to 50 to support training in smaller facilities.
- *Degree registration*: PG courses offered by approved colleges are considered recognized for qualification registration.
- *Early PG start*: Undergraduate colleges can start PG courses in clinical specialties from the 3rd year, not just the 4th.
- *Independent PG colleges*: Government-owned nonteaching hospitals can establish PG courses without needing an undergraduate college.
- *Quality standards*: Minimum infrastructure and faculty requirements for PG institutes will be established.
- *Mandatory training*: All students will undergo courses in research methodology, ethics, and cardiac life support skills.

These changes aim to make PG medical admissions more transparent, meritocratic, and accessible, while also improving student training and quality standards.



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—Dr Niranjana Shah

Medical Practice Management after MBBS

The Indian healthcare landscape is undergoing a rapid transformation. With advancements in medical technology, evolving patient expectations, and a growing emphasis on ethical practices, medical professionals require a comprehensive understanding of managing their occupations effectively. Dr Niranjan Shah's book, "Medical Practice Management" (MPM), addresses this crucial need by providing a one-stop resource for navigating the complexities of the modern medical field.

Medical Practice Management goes beyond the science and art of healing, delving into the often-overlooked aspects of MPM, including:

- **Medicolegal considerations:** The book equips doctors with the knowledge to handle legal issues and navigate ethical dilemmas with confidence.
- **Financial management:** MPM sheds light on the financial intricacies of the healthcare industry, emphasizing the importance of financial sustainability for medical practices.
- **Regulatory compliance:** Understanding government laws and service norms is paramount for ensuring patient safety and upholding ethical standards. MPM provides a clear understanding of these crucial aspects.
- **Corporate versus private practice:** The book explores the distinct management approaches required for success in both corporate and private practice settings.

This comprehensive guide empowers medical professionals to adapt to the ever-evolving healthcare landscape. Whether navigating the complexities of a corporate environment, managing a private practice, or staying abreast of the latest advancements, MPM offers invaluable insights and strategies.

Niranjan Shah MD DNB(Obstetrics and Gynecology) is Founder and Managing Director of Lotus Hospital & Research Centre, Kolhapur, Maharashtra, India. The qualifications earned by him mark a comprehensive educational journey in the field of obstetrics and gynecology, thus showcasing a dedication to advanced learning and expertise along with proven leadership in healthcare management and patient care. His penchant extends beyond clinical practice, actively engaging in academic pursuits and community service. Lotus Hospital & Research Centre and Lotus Medical Foundation are two shining examples of a low-cost community hospital for women and children, and a setup dedicated to HIV treatment and care. His dedication toward professional development of medicos is evident through the various leadership roles undertaken in various medical associations. Championing medical-social causes, his initiatives include establishing a free HIV treatment hospital, promoting sex education and HIV prevention, and participating in international medical missions, thus offering critical care to underserved communities. He is a fervent advocate for the enhancement of healthcare institutions, along with overall well-being of medical fraternity, enthusiastically advising medical professionals on nonmedical issues in medical practice management in India. Dr Niranjan is a versatile speaker and is invited to many medical forums to address on nonconventional medical practice topics. His aim is to help medical professionals in getting guidance, advice to carry on medical practice in a stress-free environment, and educate colleagues on practical management issues that are not easily available on any single platform. He is a teacher of teachers to teach various aspects of medical practice management, where "knowledge of medicine is not sufficient to practice medicine".



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