

NEET effect: Private varsities double MBBS fees

CHENNAI: Private universities in Tamil Nadu have started increasing the tuition fee for MBBS courses this academic year in anticipation that all states will be mandated to take up the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET). In premier colleges, a student joining MBBS this year will end up paying at least Rs80 lakh for the four-and-a-half-year course, not to speak of the illegal capitation fee.

The Supreme Court's order has made it mandatory for medical colleges to admit students solely on merit. But many eligible students may still have to stay out if they are unable to afford the fee charged by private universities. Effectively, colleges can make a mockery of the list by increasing the fee and admitting only those who can afford the higher fee.

"If we don't have a merit list, these colleges will continue to demand capitation fee. Seats will be given to people who can afford and not to those who deserve. We have never been able to stop it. NEET is important for private medical colleges," said Dr GN Ravindranath, who spearheads Doctors' Association for Social Equality.

The tuition fee in government colleges is Rs 4,000 (per semester) and a student pays Rs10,000 as annual fee. "Students here are admitted through a transparent single-window counselling. Pushing for NEET in government colleges is not the appropriate thing to do," he said.

At Saveetha University, the annual tuition fee for MBBS is Rs15 lakh for 2016-17, up from Rs9 lakh in 2014-15. Moreover, students have to pay Rs3 lakh towards equipment fee and Rs15,000 as admission fee in the first year. "This would mean tuition and equipment fee for the four-and-a-half-year course would be around Rs70 lakh. The college says there will be additional fees for hostel, books and food. There is no way I can afford this for my son even if I take a loan. I am not even sure if the bank will sanction so much for my child's education," said Chennai-based businessman G Satyanathan, whose 17-year-old son aims to join a medical college this year.

Parents say colleges have not openly discussed capitation fee so far. "Some employees of colleges have asked us to keep cash of up to Rs50 lakh ready," said a parent who visited at least three deemed universities.

Across the country, fee for an MBBS course in private medical colleges is at least Rs40 lakh. Kasturba Medical College, affiliated to the Mangalore-based Manipal University charges Rs41.43 lakh as course fee, and Karad-based Krishna University of Medical Science in Maharashtra will charges nearly Rs45 lakh.

Every year, as per a Supreme Court order, a committee appointed by the TN government reviews the tuition fee charged by private colleges affiliated to the state medical university. Committee members say they can only review tuition fee, not other charges. Also, deemed universities are out of their purview.

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In the past five years, tuition fee has nearly doubled in most private medical colleges. The rise is steeped in deemed universities. Parents say students joining the course this year will pay double the amount when compared to the batch passing out this year. For instance, a student passing out of the Chennai-based Chettinad Hospital and Research Institute paid Rs20.25 lakh, while one who joins the same college this year will pay Rs42.75 lakh. At Sri Ramachandra University, the annual tuition fee has nearly doubled from Rs6.5 lakh in 2011 to Rs11 lakh this year.

Private universities say their overheads have been very high. "MCI stipulations for hospitals and college infrastructure are very stringent. If we have to fulfil that, we will have to charge students," said Sri Ramachandra University vice-chancellor Dr J S N Murthy. "We have competition from several other medical colleges, including those run by the government. If we have to recruit good faculty, we have to pay them well," said a senior administrator of another university.

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