

Nation

## New MBBS curriculum fails to protect rights of disabled, LGBTQ+, says activists

*The revised MBBS curriculum proposed by the National Medical Council (NMC) has sparked controversy.*



Representative Image File Photo

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NEW DELHI: The MBBS students in the 2024 course will be taught that sodomy and lesbianism are unnatural sexual offences and transvestism is a



(NMC) has sparked controversy, with activists arguing that it does not adequately safeguard the rights of individuals with disabilities and those who identify as LGBTQ.

Dr Satendra Singh, a prominent disability activist, has expressed his dismay with the revised guidelines, arguing that they have regressed the progress made in recent years towards the inclusion of people with disabilities and LGBTQ rights.

Speaking with this paper, Dr Singh, who is also a Director Professor of the Department of Physiology, University College of Medical Sciences and GTB Hospital, Delhi, said, “The MBBS curriculum for 2024 is a significant letdown in social responsibility.”

“With great difficulty and judicial advocacy, we succeeded in including disability and LGBTQ rights in the new competency-based medical education curriculum.”

However, the current revision has undone all of our hard work and the statutory provisions of disability and transgender legislation, he said, adding that the NMC has violated the Transgender Persons Protection Act 2019.

“The future Indian medical graduate must be socially accountable, not someone trained in outdated and archaic concepts,” Dr Singh said and highlighted the absence of healthcare professionals from the LGBTQIA+ community in the NMC committee addressing queer issues.

He also added that the NMC has suddenly removed the seven hours of disability competencies from the foundation course, which was heralded as best practice globally. This violates Section 39 (2)(f) of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 mandating the inclusion of the rights of disabled in the curriculum of universities, colleges and schools.



unscientific, derogatory, or discriminatory content regarding the LGBTQ community.

However, activists said, the updated guidelines have failed to incorporate earlier suggestions to ensure the curriculum is inclusive and supports LGBTQ individuals.

Dr Singh has now submitted requests for information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, highlighting the need for transparency in the discussions and decision-making process behind the new guidelines.

Despite submitting multiple recommendations to the NMC to incorporate best practices, the latest revisions could be much better, argued activists.

Dr Prof (Dr) Aqsa Shaikh, Professor of Community Medicine, Hamdard Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, said, “NMC had itself issued the new curriculum for forensic medicine and weeded out queerphobic content from the medical curriculum after being directed by Madras High Court.”

“But in the latest edition of its guidelines, it still seems to be frozen in time in pre- 377 abrogation era and calling sexual acts like anal sex, oral sex as unnatural sexual offences, and adultery as crime and transvestism as a sexual fetish,” Dr Shaikh, who identified herself as a transgender woman, told this paper.

“This is ridiculous and the only way to undo harm is for NMC to issue an urgent corrigendum to correct this blunder. This is highly insulting to the marginalised LGBTQIA+ Indian community and contempt of court,” she said.

What’s needed is a collaborative review of the curriculum to weed out all the queerphobic content and make the curriculum more inclusive for queer people so that future medicos are competent to care for the health of LGBTQIA+ patients, she said.



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