

***Ishaan edit***

The Supreme Court's recent ruling that the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) is the only test that is to be used for admission to undergraduate medical programmes across the country could indeed ensure standardisation of medical entrance. But, India also needs to be producing many more doctors than it does now, and an entrance test that posts a very high qualification mark could be a hurdle. It may seem to help maintain a high standard of competence amongst medical professionals, but can't really be considered to be upholding merit, since reservations and the accompanying lower entry barriers apply in this system. Against such a backdrop, debarring minority medical colleges and private medical colleges from having their own entrance exams is a blunder. Private college entrances could allow for entry barriers that are not so high as to block out candidates who can join the medical profession with reasonable competence, or who missed out in the NEET process even though they posted better scores than the threshold for the reserved categories.

Besides, the exit exam (NEXT)—those hoping to practice in the country now need to clear the exam to get a licence—is already a benchmark for standards. The government could let private colleges have their own entrance exams and still control the quality of those who get into medical specialities/super-specialities. Say, 60% of the graduates from a medical college don't clear NEXT, its licence/affiliation could be revoked. Once a system of reporting NEXT performance is fully implemented, students will likely not join the institutions that have a poor performance record relative to others. What the medical education regulator must ensure is that medical colleges adhere to the standards, and that inspections are more rigorous.