

The Challenges Faced by Allottees of Medical and Dental Postgraduate Programs during Admission: A Questionnaire-based Survey Study

JAYANT TRIMBAKRAO PATHARKAR¹, MANOJ M KULKARNI², MAULIN DHIREN MEHTA³

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The Postgraduate (PG) student admission scheme laid down by Medical Counselling Committee (MCC), Directorate General of Health Services, Government of India require the allottees to report to the allotted institute in online or offline mode in view of ongoing Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Aim: To identify the problems faced by Medical and Dental PG allottees during admission process.

Materials and Methods: This was a cross-sectional, online questionnaire-based survey conducted among newly admitted students of Medical and Dental PG programs. The structured pre-validated questionnaire was filled by the students voluntarily and anonymously after giving consent. The detailed descriptive analysis

was done using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 software. To study statistical significance, variables were tested using Chi-square test.

Results: In the present study, 31(67.4%) Medical PG students and 15 (32.6%) Dentistry PG students participated. The students that reported to the allotted institute by both online and offline mode were 35 (76.1%), while only 8 (17.4%) reported by offline mode which was statistically significant ($p < 0.005$). Maximum number of students {30 (65.2%)} found online mode convenient (statistically significant; $p < 0.005$), while 12 (26.1%) said that offline mode was convenient.

Conclusion: The online reporting for admission process is time saving. Continuous upgradation of system through feedback from stakeholders is desirable.

Keywords: Medical counselling committee, Online reporting, Postgraduate admissions

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Medical education system is one of the largest in the world, having 121985 seats in 607 medical schools spread all over India [1]. Thus, to cater the admission process, there must be a robust counselling process in place for which MCC, Directorate General of Health Services, Government of India is not keeping any stone unturned to improve it. Indian has very long history of medicine, with continuous evolution in the form of reforms which include curriculum reform, addition of new medical schools, selection of students including admission process. Hence, admission process also had gone various reforms with sympathetically understanding the issues faced by these medical students and providing solutions in a structured manner [2].

The MCC had made significant changes in the admission process. The new MCC site for PG counselling is very user-friendly and is regularly updated. The counselling scheme and counselling schedules are self-explanatory with aptly answered frequently asked questions make the journey of NEET PG Qualified candidate seamlessly smooth during various rounds of counselling [3]. Still, these candidates face challenges during the admission process when there is scope of ambiguity regarding the reporting of candidate to the allotted medical or dental college online or offline.

As per the counseling scheme laid down by the MCC, the allottees of Medical and Dental PG seats are required to report to the allotted institute in online or offline mode. The current scenario of COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent travelling restrictions imposed by the Government had added to the misery of allottees during reporting to these medical or dental colleges. The candidate who is allotted seat in medical PG then one of his/her family members if found test positive for COVID-19, then the whole family will be quarantined for 14 days which makes physical attendance to the allotted college in

the stipulated time impossible affecting the future of such candidates adversely [3,4]. It was also difficult to travel from destination outside India due to governments travel advisory [4].

In order to understand the challenges faced by the students, a feedback from them is the most reliable tool. The feedback from stakeholders is extremely essential for regular improvements of the system. The understanding of challenges faced by these students will enable the administration to devise strategies that shall make the admission process more convenient. This study will also throw light on various factors affecting the admission process. Hence, this study was conducted to learn the challenges faced by the allottees during the admission process.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The analytical questionnaire-based study was conducted among newly admitted Medical and Dental students of SBKS Medical Institute and Research Centre, and KM Shah Dental College and Hospitals, Gujarat, India. This study was conducted in July 2020. The Institutional Ethics Committee approved the study with approval no. SVIEC/ON/medi/RP/20033 dated 19/05/2020.

A structured questionnaire regarding different aspects involved in admission process was prepared. The content validation was done by the experts involved in the admission process. The validated questionnaire was administered initially to 10 PG seat allottees to investigate whether it is clear to understand and acceptable. The questionnaire was then repeated to other 10 PG seat allottees and a variation in the answers score was noted. There was no significant variation noticed, hence same questionnaire without any changes was utilised in the study. There were 11 Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) in the questionnaire, out of which five MCQs were single response type, while remaining six MCQs were multiple response type.

The validated questionnaire was administered to the newly admitted medical and Dental PG students after obtaining the informed consent through a Google form. A one-week time was given to submit the responses to the questionnaire.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The detailed descriptive analysis was done using SPSS version 23.0 software. To study statistical significance, variables were tested using Chi-square test. The test is considered significant when $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Total of 46 students participated in the study, of which 31 (67.4%) were medical PG and 15 (32.6%) were dental PG students [Table/Fig-1]. These students had been given options to report for admission process either in online or offline mode, in view of ongoing COVID-19 pandemic by the authorities conducting counselling for admission process. The option of completing the process partly in online and partly in offline mode was also available. The PG students reported by online mode were 35 (76.1%), while 8 (17.4%) reported by offline mode and 3 (6.5%) students reported in both offline and online mode. There was statistically significant difference between two modes of reporting [Table/Fig-2].

Course	Male	Female
PG Medical	14	17
PG Dental	6	9

[Table/Fig-1]: Demographic details of participants.

Most of the PG students {30 (65.2%)} found online mode of reporting as convenient ($p < 0.05$) While 12 (26.1%) were in favour of offline mode. Only 4 (8.7%) said that both the modes were convenient [Table/Fig-2]. The PG students found difficulties in online reporting were mainly due delayed response from the concerned official {20 (43%)} and they were sceptical about delivery of documents to destined person/place {12 (26.1%)}, while others have cited internet and mail related issues. The students who reported by the offline mode said that the mode was suitable. Since reported physically, whatever problems they faced were resolved immediately, also the preparation of legal documents was hassle free as all necessary arrangements were available. Most of the students {30 (65.2%)} found net banking as convenient mode of payment ($p = 0.039$), while 16 (34.8%) opined that cheque payment was convenient. Majority of the PG seat allottees opined that MCC counselling scheme as good {24 (52.17%)}.

DISCUSSION

The MCC had worked day in and day out to make counselling user friendly. MCC had been updating the process of admission regularly. It addresses student's issues regularly during admission process and aptly answering the frequently asked questions [3]. In spite of extensive literature review, the authors of the present study have not found a single report on challenges during admission process. Majority of previous studies have discussed medical education and its challenges [5,6], entrance test for admission [7] or fees structure of medical seats [8,9]. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study of its kind which focused on challenges faced by the allottees of postgraduate medical and dental counselling.

There has been a tremendous increase in postgraduate medical seats in India in the recent past [1]. The simultaneous counselling process for All India Quota (15%). All India Quota, central universities, deemed universities, AIIMS, JIPMER, ECIS and AFMC through MCC for PG-MD/MS, MDS and State Counselling make admission process more complex [3,8]. This complexity and stipulated time frame for admission make parents and student to take help from private counsellor by paying huge amount [9]. The analysis of

Question	Responses			p-value
How did you report admission?	Online (35)	Offline (8)	Reported in online and offline modes (3)	<0.005
Which mode did you find convenient for reporting?	Online mode (30)	Offline mode (12)	Both online and offline mode (4)	<0.005
Do you think online counselling is a viable option instead of physical reporting in the future?	Yes (35)	No (8)	May be (3)	<0.005
Which round* do you find easier for reporting?	Round 1 (36)	Round 2 (10)		<0.005
Do you think central repository system should be there to avoid hassles of carrying documents?	Yes (35)	No (11)		<0.005
According to you, what are the advantages of Online mode Reporting?	Time saving (35) Cost Effective (21) Travelling can be avoided (36) Other (6)			
What are difficulties of online mode?	Delay in response from concerned officials (20) Internet issues (11) Not sure about delivery of documents (12) Unable to upload all the files in one go (8) Difficulty in scanning the documents (2)			
According to you, what are the advantages of offline mode?	Any doubt or problem can be solved immediately (29) Preparation of legal documents was fast (18) Document verification can be done instantaneously (14) Witness the generation of online letter (9)			
What difficulties did you face during the payment of fees?	Need to do multiple transactions (16) Insufficient staff leading to delay in process of loan (9) Unable to transfer through bank due to insufficient staff (8) Unable to make payment through unique payment ID (4)			
Which were hurdles for reporting offline in the current scenario?	Risk of travelling for elderly guardians (32) Difficulty in arranging lodging and boarding (24) Difficulty in arranging transport (24) Threat for quarantine at the reporting state (18)			
How do you rate the counselling scheme at the MCC level?	Excellent (6) Good (24) Fair (12) Poor (4)			

[Table/Fig-2]: Mode and convenience of reporting.

*Rounds are series of proceedings meant for offering admissions against the available seats. During each round the available seats are allotted on the basis of merit by the competent authority. The allottees of that round then is given time to report to the allotted institute for completion of admission process. Seats remaining vacant after a particular round are filled during subsequent rounds

feedback from the students and incorporation of changes for the seamless admission process, will curtail the financial losses spent on private counsellor.

The students participated had reported mostly by both the online and offline mode. Almost all the students found online mode convenient way of reporting in the midst of unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. This online mode can be opted for reporting in future also as it is cost effective, can save time and resources. Though PG students were in favour of online mode of reporting there are few shortcomings that were notified like- delayed response from concerned official, internet and mail related issues. Hanson MD and Eva KW, in their study about technological innovations on medical school admissions, have said that in spite of all technological advances one should not forget the essence of 'Art of Caring' with person to person contact in health care system [10].

The lesser number of PG students cited offline mode convenient, observing that their issues had been solved instantaneously, hassle free bond preparation and it being a one-time process. The PG students found net banking as convenient mode of payment though there were certain problems like delayed credit of transferred amount.

The present study, through a structured feedback, has attempted to analyse the challenges faced by the candidates allotted in PG Medical/Dental Counselling. Through this report, the authors would

like to draw the attention of all the stakeholders involved in the process including the Government administrators towards the challenges faced by the candidates. The effective remedies of these challenges will make the process seamless.

Limitation(s)

This pilot survey was done with a smaller sample size, hence interpretation of result may not be generalised. More elaborative studies with larger sample size is required to strengthen the process of admission in future.

CONCLUSION(S)

The ongoing pandemic has made us discover online mode as one of the viable options for counselling as well as for reporting which will be the saving of resources including man hours. The central repository system is need of hour in today's everchanging world of uncertainties to ease the admission process. Though most of PG students were satisfied with present counselling schemes of MCC, time to time updating and simplifying it, will make it future ready.

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PARTICULARS OF CONTRIBUTORS:

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmacology, Smt. B.K. Shah Medical Institute and Research Centre, Sumandeep Vidyapeeth Deemed to be University, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.
2. Professor, Department of Anatomy, Smt. B.K. Shah Medical Institute and Research Centre, Sumandeep Vidyapeeth Deemed to be University, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmacology, Smt. B.K. Shah Medical Institute and Research Centre, Sumandeep Vidyapeeth Deemed to be University, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.

NAME, ADDRESS, E-MAIL ID OF THE CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Jayant Trimbakrao Patharkar,
Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmacology, Smt. B.K. Shah Medical Institute and Research Centre, Sumandeep Vidyapeeth Deemed to be University, Vadodara-391760, Gujarat, India.
E-mail: jayant.patharkar@gmail.com

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