



NATIONAL EXIT TEST (NExT): RELIEF OR STRESS?

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Abstract

Introduction- With introduction of NMC Act 2019, in medical education, many more ways were open for students to learn. Also, with this act came a new evaluation pattern for the MBBS students, who will be IMGs, the NExT exam. It targets all the modalities of evaluation, the knowledge, the skill and the communication part also. Hence to evaluate all three modalities for three different purposes of NExT, the evaluation, the licensing and the elimination for PG seats, there must be solid pattern and conduction.

Discussion- The pattern must be of three steps for three objectives to be achieved. The students must also be served with mixed bag of type of questions to be evaluated truly and uniformly all over the India.

Conclusion - A rule book should be published as part of Gazette of India to make it accessible and valid for everyone who has stakes attached to NExT and NMC Act.

Introduction

The mega reform in Indian medical education was already been incorporated in 2019 via National Medical Commission (NMC) Act[1] since then there is a big question lies. Now with the enforcement of new medical education and new teaching methods, but many old evolution techniques, will they work?, how will they work?, their effectiveness? are always questionable. NMC Act 2019 came into action, mainly aims at quality of education and quantity of Indian Medical Graduates (IMGs)[2] to be made every year for serving humanity and improving doctors patients ratio. Indian Government (GOI) conceded NMC Act as a step towards affordable quality medical care to big Indian population.

NMC Act 2019, with its all aspects is very transparent in nature, was challenged by many of the nationalized associations of doctors, students and residents[3]. Main concern was found to be reformation of education norms and the NExT. In this paper we want to suggest a scheme and pattern of NExT needed, and also the requirements to be fulfilled for conduction of such big

exercise. We will also see to the points that NExT may act as relief to authorities or may put more challenging situation in front of the already constrained[4] medical system of India.

NMC act and NExT

As per described in NMC Act 2019, NExT needs to full-fill all the three aspects[5,6,1] of medical evaluation system. As per description, first is, it should vaulted properly both the theoretical and clinical aspects of final year IMGs as passing exam. Second, it can be used as a licensing exam for IMGs to practice medicine/surgery in India. Thirdly, it can also acts as competitive exams for IMGs that can make a base for postgraduate (PG) admissions i.e. its results can yield as list of students merit as ranks for PG admissions very effectively. As per the general talks with faculty and students of our institute we found that the third criteria is most important and require more attention and efforts to be successful.

As per the design of exam suggests, it can be used to ensure uniformity of training and uniform evaluation of students to be a successful IMGs. NExT as to produce IMGs, so must be able to evaluate the basic attributes designated by NMC Act for IMGs i.e. skills, knowledge, community attitudes, values, and responsiveness, so that they can function to the best of their abilities and effectively as physicians of first contact in the community.[7]

NExT will be conducted[8,9] by 2023 as per Honorable Union Ministers statement as by a “designated authority” which will be specified by NMC Board or by Central government in due course of time. The pattern of exam will also be decided by such body in guidance of NMC Act.

Challenges

All the three targets to be achieved by NExT are vivid in nature. For final year MBBS students, NExT needs to be evaluating for minimum level of skills and knowledge needed by them to be an IMG and a licensed doctor. But for PG seat distribution, making merit list, assessment should be made up-to highest level.

Other challenges[9] which might arise during the exam, is to evaluate so many students at a time with same level of test both knowledge based and clinical skills based. So, one designated authority will not be enough for it to conduct skill based exam at bed side of patients. Furthermore there will be subjective variations in evaluation if the work will be distributed to various teams of evaluators.

Lastly the instrument/instruments which will be used must be reliable, valid and feasible to conduct NExT exam. As per the list available none of the method is enough for all the three stage evaluation of MBBS students to be IMGs/PGs.

Liberty or Stress

Now coming to the main question of this topic, will it increase the load on authorities and students of will it be the beneficial for the authorities as well as for students. From time to time, it was seen that NEET-PG was in news[10] for various types of allegations, even after the best efforts of authorities to conduct the same very fairly. So, can NExT will give relief to the authorities from such things?. Will it be helpful to the students for successful IMGs/PGs. question lies as always? To avoid the above turmoil, authorities must prepare themselves to the best so that the targeted students should be liberalized from the fear of misconduct and uncertainty. They can only focus on the knowledge and skills they need to be a successful IMGs/PGs.

Problems and associated concerns

As new pattern was imposed by NMC Act 2019 in medical education, it will certainly lead to many problems. In the starting days it was opposed by various associations of medical staff. Then with the introduction of Competency based medical education (CBME) system[11], the teaching staff already working with old curriculum need to be trained by Revised Basic Course Workshops (RBCWs)[12] to make them competent for CBME. We need to find a method to meet healthcare goals as well as to keep the quality of medical education at it's best. With NExT we also have to

lay down new rules to accommodate foreign medical graduates (FMGs)[13] into the changed Indian system of medical education.

A problem can arise at a grand scale if NExT may lack in some aspects. Students, the most important stake holder of this exam may lose faith in education system, may lead to protests and undue load on our already burdened jury system. It can also affect the parents of students indirectly affecting the society.

Requirement and Pattern

As per the thought process of faculty in medical institute at Dr. S.S. Tantia MCH&RC Sriganganagar, Rajasthan, the most important thing to be handled very cautionary is the part of NExT which will provide the merit list for PG's for their allotment of various courses in various institutes. So requirement for that is infrastructure which can prove itself at military precession. Secondly, the instrument which can impart all the three parts of NEXT easily and is possible at various medical colleges. Thirdly, the authority that can bear such big burden with full faith, must be autonomous as to make it independent from any influences.

Fourthly the question pattern of the paper, which can attest skills, knowledge, and attitude and learning of a student, is must to be designed at the earliest so that students who will appear in exam, will get enough time to prepare it accordingly.

Lastly, some of the institutes like AIIMS, PGI Chandigarh,[14] have two times annually intake of students, how the single exam NEXT can cover the same. Will the autonomy so these institutes taken by NEXT exam.

It is also worth of concern and must be mentioned here that, students who already had cleared the NEET- UG exam were considered to be eligible by examining authority for MBBS course up to date but if such student may not clear the licensing exam then, will it possibly degrade the Indian health system rather than improving it.

It was already discussed in various studies by various methods of medical education and assessment[15,16]. Hence from these, multiple choice questions (MCQs), short answer type questions (SAQs), modified Essay questions (MEQs),long/essay type questions (LAQs), objective structured long examination record (OSLER), objective structured clinical examination (OSCE), long case, short case, miniCEX: MiniClinical Evaluation Exercise, and direct observation of procedural skills (DOPS) any one or combination can be used.

Suggestion for NEXT

In this section we will propose an idea, how this massive exam can be conducted. This can serve as a guide for both students and authorities, of acceptable to the "designated body". As for the purpose of passing an MBBS student to become eligible for internship we can conduct a theory exam having various clinical scenarios, it can have LAQs, SAQs or MEQs. Further it can be conducted in two parts, as like for part A, there will be syllabus covered in subjects of MBBS first year and second year. For part B, the syllabus can be from final year 1 and 2 subjects with also having some skill test as per CBME. As per the suggestion it can be conducted by institutional authorities of the same institute where students were trained in MBBS. Moreover, the central authority can conduct training for the faculty staff to meet the standards of the medical exams. Monitoring by central body can be done by using various audio-visual techniques.

The second step should be put after the completion of MBBS internship as a licensing exam or to be certified IMG certificate. A certified IMG must be allowed to practice medicine anywhere in India after a successful registration with an authority. This exam must be conducted in non home centers. The pattern can be of more towards skill and communication testing. MCQs, OSCE, DOPS and mini-CEX can be a focus to this exam pattern.

Third and the last step, which should be kept independent form any number of attempts, must be monitored very carefully. It will be a key exam for the students willing to go for PG courses or Mch/DM courses. The merit list generated from the result or this exam should be used exclusively for PG seats allotment. This can be of based on reasoning- assertion type of questions, MCQs,

audio- visual techniques like used in International English Language Test System (ILETS) and Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB)[17] can be used to assess the ability of participant to prove his/her worth for an PG course. These techniques can minimize the inter-evaluator variability and the students can be assessed in every aspect. The questions selected for the step three must be from the whole MBBS syllabus, but must be dominated by the subjects having more of clinical aspect than the theoretical aspect.

Lastly, we are going to put a unique idea here. As these days we see that use of information and technology is must for everyone to grow in their own fields and for research. So NMC Act must also include some of the exercises related to use of technology in the NExT exam. Fig -1

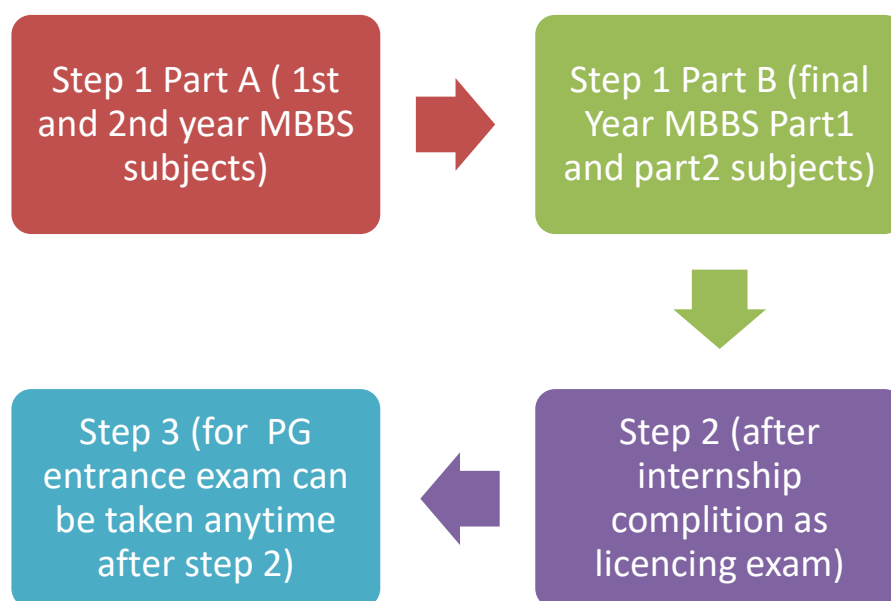


Fig -1 : - The proposed flow of exams to be conducted

Discussion

With the enforcement of new pattern of medical education and NExT exam, many of the students were in fear of taking it as such. Many of them want to know about the details like – pattern, dates, and regulation and evaluation methods. So, for the NMC Act, the policy holders should act rapidly to make such declarations, so that the hardworking students, instead of worrying, will be able to focus on the studies, skill learning and the future prospective of their career they are in. Many of the amendments will be needed in the due course as the new challenges will be unfolded on the path. Hence we recommend that, authorities can ask the various experts in this field about the conducting, pattern and feasibility of such a big exam. Lastly, the faculty members also need guidance to prepare the students for NExT. Hence guidelines must be published as soon as possible for students, faculty and the body who is going to conduct the exam.

Conclusion

As of the above discussion we conclude that, such exam if held will be useful to improve the quality of medical education. But right now both students and faculty members need clear cut guidelines for NExT. We must say that it will be a big difficult step for authorities as well as students to conduct and appear in this exam respectively. We also recommend that, authorities should prepare strongly to avoid any unforeseen problems in this whole process.

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