# Bridge Course for Enhancing Medical Pluralism

## Why in news?

\nA “bridge course” provision in the National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill 2017 has been introduced in the Lok Sabha.

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## What are the concerns in Indian healthcare sector?

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- India has only one allopathy doctor for approximately 1,613 people as against the WHO’s norm of 1 :1,000 ratio
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- This assumes that 80 per cent of the 10.23 lakh doctors registered with the Medical Council of India or State medical councilsare in active service.
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- But Indian Medical Register does not reflect doctors who have retired, left the country or passed away.
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- Therefore, the total universe of doctors in the country might actually be smaller than the official figures.
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- The shortage is compounded by the concentration of medical colleges in Southern States, as well as the reluctance of doctors to serve in rural areas despite measures such as compulsory rural internships.
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## What is the significance of AYUSH doctors?

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- AYUSH includes Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy,Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy system of medicine.
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- In India nearly 8 lakh AYUSH practitioners in the country have been providing primary healthcare in several areas.
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- Students of homoeopathy, for instance, are trained in almost every subject that an MBBS student is taught during their five-and-a-half-year undergraduate course.
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- It is often the case that textbooks, faculty and even the lecture halls where students of MBBS and Bachelor of Homoeopathic Medicine and Surgery (BHMS) are taught, are the same.
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- Like their MBBS counterparts, BHMS students also undertake an internship, including a six-month stint at a hospital.
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- When compared with public healthcare allopathy doctors the AYUSH doctors performed better in terms of time spent with patients, as well as adherence to medical history checklists.
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## What does bridge course provision is all about?

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- The NMC Bill, 2017 attempts to facilitate integration of the different systems of medicine in a much broader sense.
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- The Bill calls for a joint sitting of the NMC, the Central Council of Homoeopathy (CCH), and the Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM), at least once a year and proposes “specific educational modules or programmes to develop bridges across the various systems of medicine”.
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- According to the provision, doctors of Indian systems of medicine and homoeopathy (AYUSH) will be allowed to prescribe limited allopathic medicines upon passing the course.
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- The bridge course will only be introduced if all the members present at a joint sitting of the NMC.
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- The bill also specifies that the members present in the joint sitting can spell out the health conditions for which AYUSH practitioners will be allowed to

prescribe certain allopathic medicines.
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## What is the need for the bridge course?

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- In accordance with the Drugs and Cosmetics Act Rules, some State governments have issued orders allowing AYUSH doctors to prescribe allopathic medication.
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- The validity of such orders has been upheld by the Supreme Court.
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- In this scenario enhancing the supply of allopathic doctors is undoubtedly the main goal but achieving the ideal doctor-population ratio could take decades.
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- For that cause India wants to achieve Medical pluralism which is already a reality in several countries like China, Japan, etc.
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- Thus the bridge course is aimed to serve an important part of a broader effort to empower and better utilise the capabilities of AYUSH practitioners for healthcare delivery.
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**Source: Business Line**

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