Doctors with Disabilities

Why in news?

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Delhi High Court has ordered the formation of a committee of experts, to examine if students with hearing impairment and dyslexia can pursue MBBS/BDS courses.

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What is the court's order on?

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- The order came after two cases of students with the said disabilities were denied admission to medical colleges.
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- The court’s order has opened up a debate on two important aspects.
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- One is the actual inability of those who are physically challenged to perform a task.
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- The other is whether those with specific physical and mental disabilities should be allowed to become doctors.
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- It is also to do with social attitude towards those with physical and mental disabilities.
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What are the concerns in perceptions?

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- The claim of inability of those who suffer from physical disabilities is not a well established one.
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- There are ample examples from various fields (including medicine) where such people have excelled.
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- So clearly, it is not their disability that impedes special people.
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- It is rather the inability of society to provide opportunities for accessibility, and acceptance for them.
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- Moreover, technological progress has opened new spheres of care, functionality and hence, inclusiveness.
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- So evidently, the inability of those with disabilities is nothing more than a non-inclusive thought process.
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How is it dealt in the US?

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- In the United States, more than 20% of Americans live with a disability.
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- But only 2% of practising physicians have disabilities.
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- Despite the tiny numbers, they have associations of physicians with disabilities.
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- They fight for the rights of their members.
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- Also, they conduct studies to evaluate the functionality and patient attitudes towards doctors with disabilities.
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- Most of these associations work within the purview of the Americans with Disability Act.
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- There is thus a presence of a strong and effective statute in the US.
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- It provides the associations the scope to look into issues with the medical curricula.
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- They ensure that disabled-friendly curriculum is adopted throughout the country.
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What is the case in India?

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- In India, despite efforts by governments and activists, disability continues to be a social taboo.
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- Doctors with disabilities are a minuscule part of any population.
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- In the absence of scientific studies, this figure remains unknown in India.
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- India does not have any association or organisation to work for the cause of doctors with disabilities.
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- Even the recently formulated Right of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, has not dealt on the subject in detail.
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What is to be done?

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- Doctors, if not the first, are surely the most important contact point for the diseased and the disabled.
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- A person with disabilities will be more understanding towards a patient in a similar situation.
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- Thus, there is a need to modify our medical curricula.
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- It has to be more willing to include students with physical and mental disabilities.
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- Technical standards and counselling competencies of medical education institutes have to be redefined.
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- This is to better define the needs of medical students with disabilities.
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Source: Indian Express

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