Teaching Medicine in Local Languages

Why in news?

The demand for medicine to be taught in languages besides English has been made repeatedly and was reiterated recently by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

What is the need for regional languages in teaching medicine?

- **Linguistic dualism**- It promotes linguistic dualism since students studied in regional language upon entering a medical school find it difficult to understand concepts.
- **Doctor-Patient gap**- If a doctor communicates well in a regional language, it will help them to decrease the gap with the patient.
- **Thinking and communication**- Indian languages in higher education would improve the thinking component in an individual and probably communication too.

Is it possible to teach medicine in a regional language?

- **Possibility-** In certain countries, medicine is taught in Spanish, German and so on.
- In the National Education Policy of 2020, there is a proposal to promote regional languages.
- A stage has come where some Greek and Latin terms have been done away with a shift to Anglicised terms.
- So, it is possible with certain modifications.
- When we say a regional language, there could be an overlap of words from different languages.
- Before opting for regional languages as the medium of instruction, there is a need to develop a standardisation tool for the curriculum through which we can easily compare and correlate things.
- **Current situation**- In India, medical students are guided by regulations from the National Medical Commission (NMC).
- As of now, students cannot completely study in the regional language because the NMC declares the medium of instruction as English.
- So, teaching in a regional language can only be supplementary in case a student does not understand something in English.

Have there been attempts to offer medicine in Tamil?

- Some of the early efforts to translate medical textbooks into Tamil were made in Sri Lanka.
- About 10,000-12,000 technical terms were translated, standardised and handed over to the '**Sorkuvai' scheme** of the Tamil Nadu government, which is a collection of technical terms.
- Alumni associations come up with materials for students who had studied in Tamil up

to Class XII.
- There have also been some concerted efforts to teach in the regional language in the medical college which is a supplementary one.

What are the challenges in having medical education in local languages?

- **Professional competence**- English is required for professional competence as it is the international language of science and medicine.
- There is also a new concept called English for Medical Purposes.
- **Uniform understanding**- Medicine is an area where we need to have uniform understanding in certain aspects across the globe where uniform nomenclature is required.
- **Training the staffs**- To train the teachers to teach in regional languages will take more time.
- **Availability of study materials**- The availability of books and materials in local languages is a serious concern.

What is the way ahead?

- Interpersonal communication is important when dealing with patients where the regional language will help students.
- In terms of medical knowledge, to develop our reading skills during undergraduate and post-graduation and research, English will help us.
- As far as practice is concerned, it includes both the regional and English language.
- So, the regional language may be a supplement, whereas English is the essential language.
- Based on one's interests, regional language can be taken up as a supplement for better understanding and innovation.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/should-medicine-be-taught-in-the-local-languages/article65760417.ece

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