Why do Indians go abroad for Medical Studies?

Why in news?

When students from India studying in Ukraine cried out for help, it became clear that there were a large number of them trapped in a war zone.

What is the status of students studying abroad?

- According to estimates from Ukraine, reported in the media, around 18,000 Indian students are in Ukraine.
- Hundreds of students are stuck in several regions of Ukraine, while for those who have returned, an uncertain future threatens, unless the Government finds a solution soon.
- **Preferred destination**- Indian students have been heading out to Russia, China, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Philippines to pursue a medical degree.
- **Reasons**
    1. The medium of education for these students is English, a language they are comfortable with.
    2. The amount spent on living and the medical degree is far more affordable than paying for an MBBS seat in private medical colleges in India.
    3. The lack of equal opportunities exacerbated by the caste factor in the Indian context.
    4. It could broaden students' mind and thinking, expose them to a whole range of experiences, and their approach to issues and crises is likely to be far better.

Doesn't India have enough colleges?

- **Availability of seats**- In India, there are certainly far more MBBS aspirants than the MBBS seats.
- In NEET 2021, as per a National Testing Agency press release, 16.1 lakh students registered for the exam, 15.4 lakh students appeared for the test, and 8.7 lakh students qualified.
- As per data from the National Medical Commission (NMC), in 2021-22, there were 596 medical colleges in the country with a total of 88,120

MBBS seats.

- **Distribution-** Additionally, these colleges are also not distributed evenly across the country.
- **Costs**- Roughly 65,000 seats are available within the affordable fee segment.
- The costs of an MBBS degree in a Government college tot up to a few lakhs of rupees for the full course, but in a private medical college, it can go up to Rs. 1 crore for the five-year course.
- In case it is a management seat, capitation fees can inflate the cost by several lakhs again.
- In Ukraine, an average close to Rs. 30lakh- Rs. 40 lakh, inclusive of lodging and boarding is needed.
- **Role of NEET**- A majority of the students had written NEET at least twice, and only decided to move after they could not get an MBBS seat.
- On return, the requirement is to clear the Foreign Medical Graduates Examination, a licensure examination held for students who have studied medicine abroad.
- **Income Disparities**- The disparities in income of doctors, and others, like nurses and allied health professionals, are also a key factor in making an MBBS degree attracting.

What is the solution?

- If the aim is to make medicine more accessible to students of the country, the path ahead is not in the private sector, but in the public sector, with the Central and State governments' involvement.
- State and Central governments can start more medical colleges, as recommended by NITI Aayog, by utilising district headquarters hospitals, and expanding the infrastructure to benefit students from the lower and middle socio-economic rung.
- The Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana has been working to strengthen facilities for quality medical education in the country.
- Creating more medical colleges will be beneficial for the country, if access and availability can be ensured.

The Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) approved in 2006 aims to set up institutions in the line of AIIMS and upgrade existing Government medical college institutions.

References

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