

## THE WORTH OF THE NATIONAL LICENSING EXAMINATION (NLE)

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Sir,

Pakistan is one of the most populous countries of the world. For a total population of 226,500,302 individuals<sup>1</sup>, Pakistan has 222,221 registered MBBS doctors out of which >80% are non-specialist MBBS doctors<sup>2</sup>. Thus, currently the doctor to person ratio in Pakistan is about 1:1000<sup>3</sup>.

With 1.2% of GDP spending of annual budget in the healthcare domain in 2020-21<sup>4</sup>, Pakistan is providing limited healthcare facilities to its population mainly through the services of these non-specialist MBBS doctors. These doctors provide their services largely working as General Practitioners (GP) and to a lesser extent as Medical Officers (MO) in public and private hospitals. It should be noted that most of the emergency departments of public and private hospitals are run by these non-specialists MO. Apart from a few exceptions, these emergency doctors do not have formal training (certificate course, diploma, or degree) to handle medical emergencies.

Considering the structure of undergraduate healthcare training in Pakistan, MBBS training is of 6-year duration: 2-year basic sciences, 3-year clinical sciences, and 1-year house-job. For the first five years there is a structured training and assessment program. But there is no structured training and assessment program for house-job training. House officers in most of the cases learn from the working of MO or postgraduate students in the hospitals. In the last 10 years, there has been uncontrolled opening of private medical colleges with limited resources. And, there is also an influx of poorly-trained students in the foreign countries seeking a house-job in Pakistan. Therefore, a structured training and assessment curriculum with the monitoring of house-job is the dire need of Pakistan.

In the above background, the present scenario is that the house-officers who are the backbone of healthcare facility for the Pakistani community are themselves poorly trained and are certified without any formal assessment. PMC is the sole certifying authority to provide license to these house-officers who, after getting certified, are allowed to work anywhere in Pakistan and in any capacity of opening a private GP clinic or working in a public or private hospital including their emergency departments.

PMC has taken two steps for ensuring competencies of these house-officers:

- a. With the help of medical leaders all over the Pakistan, PMC in 2021 has defined its Framework of Competencies for

medical graduates. It includes 7 steps of 49 competencies and a set of 15 procedural skills.

- b. PMC has introduced a National Licensing Examination (NLE).

With the introduction of NLE, PMC is providing a central assessment procedure of house-officers who are not otherwise assessed for their training. In this way, PMC is justifying its responsibility of providing quality doctors to the community. And, it is likely to ensure trust of the Pakistani community in PMC. Here, a question is raised: is a single assessment enough or should there be a renewal of NLE after, for example, 5 years?

It should be noted, NLE is a MCQs-based examination for the assessment of knowledge domain only. For clinical skill and attitude domains, a clinical assessment (e.g., OSCE) is required. Additionally, for appearing in the NLE, house-officers will face a financial cost, which should be kept to a minimum.

Needless to say, an assessment must be preceded by a structured curriculum. And, through this curriculum, PMC may monitor the implementation of its competency framework. In order to effectively save people from medical emergencies there should be at least a short-term training program of 6-month certificate or a 24-month diploma program for post-house-job emergency medicine training. An NLE renewal may also be considered if combined with the requirement of CME hours to ensure update of knowledge.

### REFERENCES

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Received: 02-08-2021

Accepted: 20-10-2021