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NEET 2019 mandatory for overseas MBBS students: Boon or bane?

With double screening tests, a number of new changes, and added pressure, will NEET 2019 help produce better doctors for India?

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Roshni Chakrabarty | India Today Web Desk
New Delhi
December 11, 2018 UPDATED: December 13, 2018 12:07 IST



NEET 2019 has seen many changes from NEET 2018. NEET will be mandatory for even overseas MBBS aspirants. But will the double screening tests help produce better doctors for India?

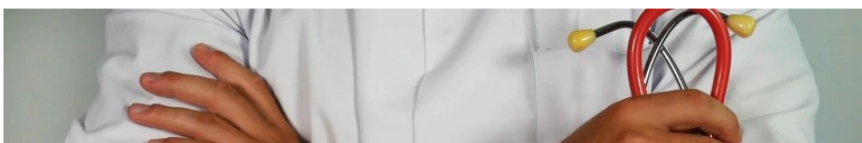
Registrations for NEET 2019 recently came to an end on December 7 and this time, the all-India medical exam is going to be conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA), which will hopefully give the candidates a smooth and streamlined experience.

Number of applicants surge as NEET mandatory for overseas MBBS students




The number of applicants for NEET was set to surge this year because candidates opting to pursue MBBS in any university abroad would also have to clear NEET for the process.

"Last year there were approximately 13 lakh students who had enrolled for NEET 2018. The number will spike this year because NEET has been made mandatory for overseas MBBS students as well," says Saju Bhaskar, President of Caribbean-based Texila American University, a MCI recognized medical university.

India only offers around 60,000 medical education seats in total for both govt and private colleges, which makes it necessary for many candidates to go abroad for their medical education.



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The number of applicants for NEET was set to surge this year because candidates opting to pursue MBBS in any university abroad would also have to clear NEET for the process.

NEET 2018 to NEET 2019: Changes made

NEET has seen many changes this year. In February 2018, NEET was made mandatory for even overseas MBBS aspirants, but many candidates planning to pursue MBBS abroad were not ready.

"In September, as a one-time exemption to medical aspirants, the High Court directed that students who did not enroll for NEET 2018 can study medicine abroad," says Bhaskar

"Further, the High Court of Delhi gave a one-time exemption even to students who failed in NEET to study medicine abroad," he added.

.Thus, in 2018, the NEET mandate to study medicine in abroad was completely quashed. However, from 2019, NEET will be mandatory for every student dreaming of becoming a doctor.

Students who went abroad in 2018 to study medicine had to take an eligibility certificate from MCI whether they had qualified NEET or not.

Rise in applicants to foreign medical colleges in 2018

Medical colleges abroad saw a rise in the number of applicants in 2018 because from 2019, they wouldn't be able to do so without clearing NEET first.

"We saw a surge in the number of students this year," says Bhaskar, about the number of medical applicants at Caribbean-based Texila American University in 2018.

"The academic background of these students was also good. They didn't want to take a chance and waste another year because 2019 may see many more changes which may or may not be good for them," he adds.

"We had got thousands of applications from candidates who had qualified NEET, those who did not register for NEET, and those who failed NEET. We offered admissions based on overall profile, and not just the NEET performance," he says.



Would someone who didn't clear NEET be eligible candidate to be a doctor?



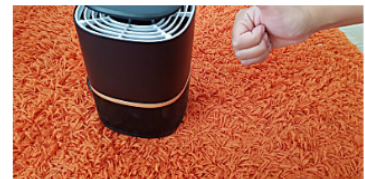
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Mandatory NEET for overseas MBBS students: Boon or bane?

The year 2018 was the buffer period offered to students wishing to pursue medical wherein they could apply to a foreign medical college even if they didn't appear for NEET 2018 or failed the exam. But this year, even these students will have to sit for the all-India medical exam by NTA.

Many candidates find the mandatory NEET clearance for overseas MBBS students rather unfair as they will need to clear MCI's Foreign Medical Graduates Examination or FMGE if they want to return to India and practice medicine here.

But would anyone who didn't clear NEET be a suitable candidate to be a future doctor?

"It is not necessary that students who do not qualify NEET are not good enough to study medicine. We have seen cases of students who are academically excellent but could not score in NEET due to various reasons," says Bhaskar.

He adds that there are those students who concentrate more on getting high scores in board exams and are unable to concentrate on clearing competitive exams.

"Another category is the students who qualify NEET but don't get a medical seat in a Government college in India. They prefer to study abroad owing to affordable tuition fees and no donation. Also because of the reservation quota, many deserving candidates don't get the desired colleges in India for which they go abroad to study medicine," Bhaskar clarifies.

Double screening tests for both India and overseas candidates

Another important change in NEET is that from 2019 onwards, both Indian and overseas medical aspirants will have to go through two rounds of screening.

"NEET remains common for both and FMGE remains the exit exam for overseas students while NEXT will be the exit exam for Indian medical students," explains Bhaskar.

Every year around 10,000 overseas medical students, after completing their course, return to India to write MCI's FMGE in order to practice as a qualified doctor here.

"The double screening for medical students has its own pros and cons. While we are aiming to create excellent quality doctors for future workforce, we are putting a lot of pressure on these students. One screening would have been enough to test the competence of the aspirants," he adds.



Will the added pressure of double screening tests from after 2019 help produce the number of doctors that India needs?

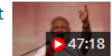
Does India need a few really good doctors or a lot of half-qualified doctors?

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almost half the doctors in India are not properly qualified.

India not only has a shortage of doctors in general (there is one government allopathic doctor for every 10,189 people, whereas WHO guidelines suggest 1 doctor for 600 people), but it also faces a severe lack of highly qualified doctors.

Will the added pressure of double screening tests help produce the number of doctors that India needs?

"The need of the hour is to create highly qualified doctors in large numbers," says Bhaskar.

"We, for example, work towards creating quality doctors as our curriculum is aligned with the medical curriculum in the US which is far more rigorous as compared to the Indian medical curriculum. It is not easy to complete the course if students don't work hard. As an evidence of the same, 96% of our medical students qualify the FMGE exam," he adds.

Bilingual question papers for regional students

In NEET 2019, students are being allowed to opt for question sheets in any of the 11 languages listed by NTA in its information bulletin. To avoid any confusion, NTA will also issue English question papers to students opting for regional language.

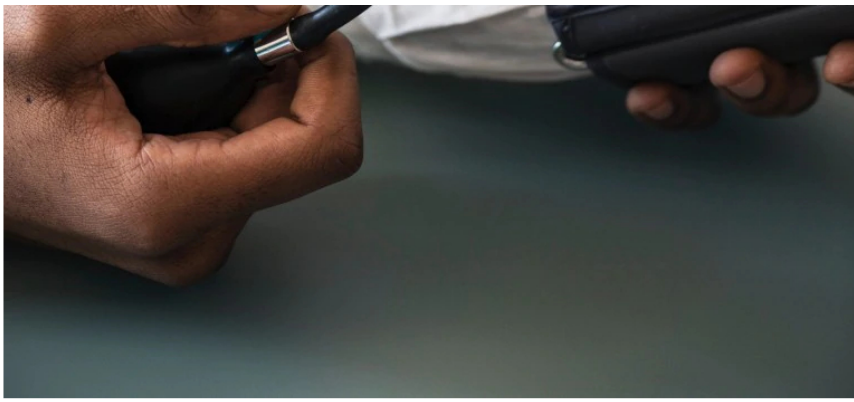
The 11 languages in which candidates can opt for question sheets are -- English, Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Marathi, Odia, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu.

"Around 10,000 students go abroad for MBBS every year. It is important that there are no lapses in 2019 NEET examination and admissions to Indian and overseas medical universities happen smoothly without any delays," says Bhaskar.

As per the NTA plan this year, candidates opting for English would be provided a test booklet in English only; however, candidates opting for Hindi or any other regional language would be provided bilingual test Booklet in English and Hindi or the opted regional language.

NTA has clarified that in case of any ambiguity in translation of any of the questions, its English version shall be treated as final.





Around 10,000 students go abroad for MBBS every year.

NEET 2018: Translation errors and delays caused

NEET 2018 proved to be difficult for many students as **there were 49 translation errors out of 180 questions in the Tamil NEET question paper**. This led to a lot of issues and delays which NEET 2019 will hopefully sort.



"The new plan comes as a welcome move as last year I had opted for Tamil language question sheet. But due to various discrepancies in the question paper I could not get 50 percentile that was the NEET qualifying eligibility criteria. It is good that English question sheet will also be issued to students this year so that there is no room for confusion," said an MBBS aspirant, Raghavendra KS.

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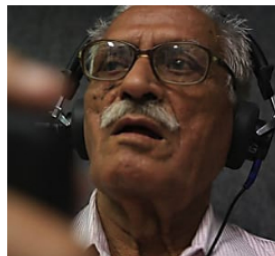
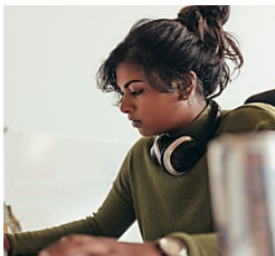
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