SC nod to single common test for medical courses

BY PRASHANT K. NANDA & NIHIL KANEKAR

The Supreme Court on Monday passed an order that for the first time will enable a common medical entrance test for all private and government medical colleges in India.

The Medical Council of India (MCI) will oversee a common entrance test each for undergraduate and postgraduate medical programmes in the country. Every year about 30,000 students are admitted to undergraduate programmes and some 11,000 for postgraduate courses.

The order by justices R.V.

Raveendran and A.K. Patnaik came after several medical colleges challenged the apex medical education regulatory body's move to organize a common entrance test.

In response, MCI had moved the Supreme Court in October.

The decision to hold a joint entrance test would not only make it easier to administer, it will also reduce pressure on aspirants who sometimes have to appear in anywhere between 12 and 17 entrance examinations.

"Normally a student has to give 17 exams for one medical seat. Also there are problems like clash of dates and multiple fees. We had suggested a common exam as is in engineering. Then the MCI regulation came. But there was some problem in Tamil Nadu because of some private colleges," said A.D.N. Rao, an advocate for a group of students, who had in 2008 moved court demanding such a student-friendly move. "This court direction will be a big relief for students."

There are some 271 medical colleges in the country, of which 138 are government-administered and 133 are under private management.

MCI board members are "rushing for an emergency meeting" and will deliberate on the "possible implications" of the order on medical education in the country, said Ranjit Roy Chaudhury, member, board of governors of MCI.

The meeting was on till the time of going to press. It was not immediately clear if undergraduate courses in dentistry and specialized postgraduate diploma courses such as in child health will come under the purview of the common entrance test.

The response from private medical colleges was mixed.

K. Ramnarayan, vice-chancellor of the privately run Manipal University in Karnataka that also offer medical courses, said he was not against such a concept. "If you look at international practice, it's not a bad idea. It's a logical extension," Ramnarayan said. "We welcome the move if conducted objectively. Implementation and rigour of the test, however, need to be taken care of objectively."

P.K. Gupta, founder and chancellor of Sharda University in Greater Noida on the outskirts of Delhi, expressed some reservations. Since education and health are the responsibility of both the Centre and the state governments, the common tests could become contentious issues, he said.

"Every state has its own entrance test and now we have to see how it (the order) is impacting that," Gupta said. "We have not seen the court order and after reading the details, would be able to give a road map."

The court noted that since the decision in this regard has already been notified, MCI and the Central government can proceed on holding the common entrance test.

Advocate Amarendra Sharan and Somesh Jha, appearing for MCI, drew the attention of the court that the Centre on 13 August had said MCI can go ahead with the implementation of a single entrance test, and the regulations were notified in December.

The judgement may also help resolve differences between the health and human resource development ministries. The latter was proposing that entrance tests for undergraduate engineering and medical programmes should be clubbed together.

prashant.n@livemint.com

PTI contributed to this story.
Not Getting Enough Sleep? Turn Off the Technology

Watching TV, checking text messages or email before hitting the bed is depriving Americans their quota of sleep, impacting their work, mood, sex lives and health.

Dependence on television, cell phone and laptop screen is not only eating into the time people spend in bed, it is also interfering with the quality of sleep they get. It's not just those who stay up late to check the news, chitchat online and send text messages before turning off the lights who are being shortchanged by their nighttime habits. "Many of us are still using our cell phones and laptop screens before we go to bed," said a sleep researcher from the University of California, San Diego. "It's not just the people who stay up late, it's everyone else who spends time in bed with their devices turned on." 

Researchers have found that the blue light emitted by electronic devices can interfere with the production of melatonin, a hormone that helps regulate sleep. "The blue light suppresses melatonin production," said the researcher. "This can lead to insomnia and disrupt the body's natural sleep-wake cycle." 

People are increasingly using mobile devices and computers for work and social activities late in the day, which can interfere with their ability to fall asleep and feel rested the next morning. "It's not just the content of what you're looking at on your device before bed, it's the light it emits," said the researcher. "This can disrupt your circadian rhythms and make it harder to fall asleep." 

Sleep experts recommend that people limit their exposure to electronic devices in the hours leading up to bedtime. "It's important to avoid using electronic devices for at least an hour before bed," said the researcher. "This can help reduce the amount of blue light exposure and promote better sleep." 

Economic Times ND 08/30/2011

P4

Sleep Offenders

Sleep Offenders is a new website that helps people identify and track their sleep patterns. The website allows users to set goals for their sleep and receive personalized feedback to help them improve their sleep. Users can also track their progress and see how their sleep habits have changed over time. The website is available online at www.sleepoffenders.com.

The website has a user-friendly interface and allows users to access their sleep data from any device with internet access. The website also offers a mobile app for smartphones and tablets, which allows users to track their sleep on the go.

Sleep Offenders uses advanced analytics to provide users with personalized insights and recommendations to help them improve their sleep. The website offers a range of features, including:

- Sleep tracking and analysis
- Goal setting and progress tracking
- Personalized feedback and recommendations
- Mobile app for smartphones and tablets

The website is free to use and available to anyone who wants to improve their sleep. Sleep Offenders is currently available in English, but plans to expand to other languages in the future.

Sleep Offenders is committed to helping people improve their sleep and live healthier lives. The website is backed by a team of sleep experts who are dedicated to helping users achieve their sleep goals. Sleep Offenders is the perfect tool for anyone who wants to take control of their sleep and improve their overall health and well-being.
Mindless regulation

AICTE covers up incompetence with blunt action

If there was ever a decision that proved that the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) isn’t doing its job properly, it is its blanket ban on part-time MBA courses. This means that the regulator for technical education will no longer approve such courses and those that are in operation will not be given permission to extend them once they are completed. In other words, by 2012, there will no longer be any AICTE-certified part-time MBA courses. AICTE officials say the rational for doing this is that several B-schools are misusing the facility, running other programmes under the guise of an MBA course and are even recruiting fresh graduates instead of those with work experience. This is undoubtedly true, as any recruiter will attest. But there are also many reputed institutes running decent part-time courses. Should they be penalised for other institutions’ sins? Surely AICTE should do some soul-searching about its own efficacy as a regulator and enforcer of technical education standards. Its solution to a problem of poor governance in part-time MBA courses is the equivalent of, say, the electricity regulator banning electricity transmission on grounds that T&D thefts are high. Using the same logic, there are many fly-by-night B-schools under AICTE’s bailiwick. Should it ban all B-schools?

To be sure, the ban on part-time is unlikely to be as disruptive as the rules for admissions, curricula and fees for the post-graduate diploma in management (PGDM) that it notified in December, a matter that is now in court. Compared to the 200,000-odd seats available for full-time MBA courses from some 2,000 institutions, part-time MBA courses under AICTE’s ambit cover just 20,000 students in some 400 colleges. But as with the full-time PGDM, demand for the part-time MBA is growing robustly. Just as the PGDM is replacing the college graduation degree as the basic qualification for entry-level employment in a host of professions, the part-time MBA is increasingly being considered a tool for mid-career advancement by employers and employees alike, since it does not require a sabbatical. The popularity of the MBA degree can be seen from the fact that the US, the world’s largest economy, turns out just over 100,000 MBA students each year; in India, 300,000 youngsters appear for the full-time PGDM entrance tests. Part-time MBAs from reputed institutions also fill an economic gap because at ₹1 lakh at the most, they are significantly cheaper than the full-time MBA, so it is easy to see why they are likely to grow in popularity.

Given the robust latent demand a blanket ban is unlikely to put an end to part-time MBAs. If anything, the lack of regulation is likely to encourage more and more unscrupulous businessmen to enter the field by offering such degrees with uncheckable affiliations and certifications from questionable “foreign” institutions, intensifying the very anomalies that AICTE hopes to check. Indeed, AICTE has not covered itself with glory with its indiscriminate approvals to all manner of B-schools and other technical educational institutions. Instead of trying to cover up for its mistakes with restrictive and heavy-handed regulations that are unlikely to enhance the quality of business management education in India, AICTE should focus on better, not more, regulation.
India on mind, Carnegie Mellon University thinks digital

SRAJEEV DAS GUPTA
& PIVALI MANDAL
New Delhi, 7 March

C
arnegie Mellon University President Jared Leigh Cohon has been trying to push "digital education" as the next big revolution in the sector. Just a few years ago, Cohon, one of the most respected educational administrator in the US, met Apple Inc CEO Steve Jobs, requesting him to insert an application to deliver undergraduate courses on the iconic iPhone, on an experimental basis. Jobs refused point-blank, saying educational applications were "boring".

Cohon, however got a more encouraging response from Facebook's maverick co-founder, Mark Zuckerberg. He went to him with a simple offering — digital education is good, but it misses out on social interaction that students develop while living on the campus. So could Facebook fill in this gap in the digital platform? Zuckerberg told Cohon he did not understand the digital education business, but he would be willing to integrate Facebook if the university built applications for such an interaction.

Cohon says: "Digital education is a disruptive technology, as it could bring education at a lower cost to the masses. But, more important, it is an ideal way to reach markets like India, where cost is a key factor and the majority knows English."

Mellon may be a private university, charging a steep $50,000 annually with no scholarships at the undergraduate level — certainly more expensive than other competing US universities. But the high costs have not deterred Indian students from coming here in droves. They constitute over 8 per cent of Mellon's 11,000-strong student fraternity, and, as many as 150 of them are in the undergraduate studies. This is the reason why Mellon is aggressively pushing, despite its constraints, in making India one of the key markets in its ambition to become a global university.

"Our strategy in India is clear — we will collaborate with local institutions, as we don't have huge resources to invest. We will offer our faculty, courses and technology. India is surely a key market for us," says the soft-spoken Cohon. As part of that game plan, Mellon has tied up with Indian companies to offer undergraduate courses in their university in engineering, mechanics and computer science. In the four-year course, students study for two years at Mellon and two in India, and get a Mellon degree.

But the next step is to go for post-graduate studies as well. As research with the Nudars, Mellon has been envisaged for this. Cohon is also looking at tying up with Indian companies to set up centres for research and post-graduate programmes for their employees. He says Mellon has been able to commercialise products and technology developed in its labs and research centres. "We can collaborate with companies or institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology to commercialise products or technology built in labs," says Cohon.

Mellon is also open to the Indian corporate sector providing funds, which could be used for financial assistance to students in the US. But, he also believes that the chances of such deals is rare, as Indian companies are more keen on setting up their own universities and foundations of education within India.

Mellon believes the experimental digital education model could be an attractive proposition for markets like India, where most students know English. Building the course material, of course, costs a lot — about $1 million for one course, but the cost can be spread across a larger number of students. Cohon says: "Of course, the key issue is to ensure quality of content and have intellectual property built into the software to assess whether a student is learning. Surely these programs that we are now working on at the undergraduate level will be prepared at a fraction of the cost of a physical course, but a business model has to be built."

Have US universities fundamentally changed after the financial meltdown and 9/11? Are these universities losing their earlier attractiveness? Cohon answers in the affirmative. He says there are three things. One, in the aftermath of 9/11, there has been a significant rise of universities in Australia, Singapore and western Europe, especially because getting student visas in the US was getting increasingly difficult. Two, the financial meltdown obviously meant that many of the rich families and companies, who funded universities, reduced their support. So financial assistance dried up. And three, non-US universities are improving in terms of quality and are also cheaper in many cases.

Mellon, however, has already taken rapid strides globally. It has set up a Mellon campus in Qatar, and is running programmes in Greece, Portugal, Australia and Singapore, to name a few. In Qatar, for instance, the financing of the campus, including paying the staff, is completely taken care of by the Qatar Foundation. In Portugal, its programmes are supported by the government, which wants the country to become a higher educational hub. In Greece, it is supported by a local telecom company.

So is Mellon looking for government financial support? Cohon rules that out, saying the Indian government already has many other areas in education that it has to look at on priority. But, he is looking forward to a legal framework that would define the entry of foreign universities into the country.

Cohon also wants the perception that Mellon charges heavily and makes massive profits to change in India. "We are a not-for-profit organisation and our fees are higher because we are a privately run institution," quips Cohon.
Technology helps disabled people, but is expensive

Rohit Parekh Jain (20) who suffers from cerebral palsy spoke a sentence for the first time in his life after using Avaz, in February last year.

Rohit Parekh Jain, a 20-year-old from Chennai, suffers from cerebral palsy and has not been able to communicate verbally all his life. But just over a year ago, in February last year, he spoke a sentence for the first time in his life after using Avaz, a device with a graphical interface, processor, software and a non-contact switch that can be used by children with cerebral palsy or poor motor skills to select alphabets and construct sentences. A former student of Vidya Sagar, Jain was in Class 12 when he first used Avaz. "Using Avaz, he can now say anything that he wants to and can communicate with people on his own," says Kalpana Rao, principal of Vidya Sagar, Chennai. Last year, the innovators at Invention Labs in Chennai launched Avaz (priced at a moderate Rs 30,000), which won the National Award for Empowerment of People with Disabilities in 2010. The device was conceptualised during the Silent Revolution Conference (2009) in Chennai. "For 10 years before that, we were importing a similar device, but this was very expensive," Rao adds.

India is home to nearly 70 million people with disabilities. But recent advancements in technology have produced many applications that help make the lives of disabled people easier. Assistive Technologies (AT) not only help them communicate with others, but also develop important life skills. Some of the most popular AT hardware and software products include speech recognition, which allows data entry by voice commands rather than a mouse or keyboard. Similarly, on-screen keyboards provide the image of a standard or modified keyboard on the computer screen, and touch screens allow direct selection or activation of the computer by touching the screen. Further, modern technology has made many useful tools for people who read and write Braille, such as electronic Braille note-takers, which are portable devices with Braille keyboards that visually challenged people can use to enter information. Other technologies range from electronic wheelchairs, computers to automatic page turners.

Arathi Abraham, principal designer, 9982 Design, Chennai, has developed Slate, a content development tool aimed at parents and teachers. She says, "The software enables teachers to create audio-visual communication aids for children with learning disabilities, autism and low vision. It can also be used to create a custom media player for movies, music, audio books and websites that can be accessed independently." Currently, Slate is used in special schools in Delhi, Bangalore and Chennai.

However, experts feel that though technologies can bring about a revolution in the lives of disabled people, they are very expensive, and to make them affordable for everyone is still a distant dream for many in India. "Specially challenged people need affordable and locally usable technology solutions to empower them and overcome challenges. Many of the technologies like JAWS, which costs more than Rs 4 lakh, are beyond the reach of the poor," said Agnel Qureshi, manager of Disabilities New Asia. Qureshi, who is also the vice-president of Global Alliance on Accessible Technologies and Environments, says that as of now, there is no policy or law to support technologies for people with disabilities except the Persons with Disabilities Act 1995. Although Dr Madhumita Puri, executive director of the Society for Child Development, New Delhi, feels that technology has revolutionised the way people with visual or hearing impairment participate in society these days, "There is space for development. A thrust must be given to vernacular languages. Also, as most of the materials are in English, there should be more programmes that deal with translation works".
Need for quality research centres

A LL human beings have the potential to transform the world. Historians have noted how politicians-warriors and entrepreneurs have changed the world and defined us through the ages. Not unfairly, however, have appreciated the role that scientists and economists could play in deepening our understanding of the universe. Within our country, we have failed singularly to build the institutional foundations for research laid down by ancient scholars such as Charaka and Brahmaahattra.

Few Indians have received adequate recognition for their pioneering work done inside the country. One recalls the movie Ek Doctor Ki Maut (Death of a Doctor), which was based on a real-life story of a budding scientist working on a vaccine for leprosy, who was ignored, discouraged and repeatedly humiliated. Ultimately, it led him to commit suicide. I know of a researcher in India whose contributions on 'high-performance organisations' has been acknowledged by the Harvard Business Review as a pioneering effort. There are Indian scientists, economists, management scholars and even Nobel laureates whose contributions the world gratefully acknowledges. Unfortunately, they could excel and get recognition in their respective knowledge domains only once they left the shores of our bureaucratic universities. Recently, I came across such an example.

For scientists and researchers the world over, it is a lifetime aspiration to be published in prestigious journals such as Nature, Harvard Business Review, Administrative Science Quarterly, or Science. To get an editorial commentary on one's research in such journals is considered a big achievement. The December 23, 2010 issue of Nature carried an editorial on research of Somnath Baiya Roy on turbulence created by windmill turbines. In 2004, Roy was working at Princeton University (the same university where Albert Einstein worked) as an environmental engineer and atmospheric modeller. He showed that wind farms could have a significant negative effect on near-surface temperatures and affect agricultural production in nearby farms.

Renewable energy (especially wind and solar energy) has been the flavour of the new millennium and big money and effort are being expended globally in tapping these abundant and seemingly cheap resources. Big multinationals and oil-energy giants have earmarked enormous research funds for developing lead products in renewable energy. Roy's work was, therefore, an antithesis to the prevailing wisdom, and according to the editorial, his findings were roundly criticised by most commentators. Some said he was a paid agent of the thermal energy lobby, others threatened him with dire consequences. Nature quotes a president of one US-based wind farm company writing to Roy to consider "how much heat is your head turning out, while you consider such thoughts?"

The editorial says that in October 2010, Roy, who had moved to University of Illinois, published a 25-year data set suggesting that those constructin wind farms should consider low-turbulence turbines. The research showed that the main impact — raising of surface temperatures at night and lowering during the day — could benefit agriculture by decreasing frost damage and extending the growing season if managed properly. His work was now being hailed as one that will result in better designing of wind turbines and better location of the sites that in turn could boost agriculture production.

Roy’s research is something that our own scientists and researchers could also do in their own labs and on their computers. But, as we all know, it requires a personal vi-
Next-gen engineers need to update skills to work with new materials and an ever-growing information technology

PURNENDU GHOSH

ENGINEERS work under various constraints. The constraints are imposed by nature, cost, safety, environment, ergonomics, reliability, manufacturability and maintainability among others.

Engineers have done pretty well in the past on various fronts for nation's progress and prosperity. Next generation engineers, however, need to broaden their skills, because they have to work with new materials and ever-growing information technology in an ever-changing techno-bugged industry and society. In the knowledge-driven world, the tools of creation are proliferating, and in this scenario engineers are expected to possess the ability to innovate and integrate their knowledge across a broad spectrum of disciplines. Industry wants engineers "equipped for the complex interactions, across many disciplines, of real-world engineered systems". We expect among our engineers the confidence to handle unknown and unexpected problems. Global perspective and the capacity to work in multidisciplinary and culturally-diverse teams are other characteristics engineers need to have in their armory.

In this emerging scenario, writes William Wulf and George Fisher, engineering education must shift its "centre of gravity". "As the world becomes more complex, engineers must appreciate more than ever the human dimensions of technology. They have a grasp of the panoply of global issues, be sensitive to cultural diversity, and know how to communicate effectively." It simply means engineering education needs a change.

The gap between "what employer wants and what is taught" is widening. According to some experts, fundamentals should include (in addition to physics, chemistry and mathematics) biology, and the knowledge of the global cultural and business contexts. The engineering curriculum, says James J Duderstadt, should give more emphasis on "information-rich science" while reducing the emphasis on "reductionist science". Another view is that more balanced curriculum should give emphasis on synthesis rather than analysis. The merger of creative disciplines (art, music, architecture) with engineering activities (design and innovation) will add value to the curriculum.

Option for more elective courses needs to be introduced. The present day engineers also require special skills such as the ability to manage complex and uncertain situations, ability to advocate and influence quality of entrepreneurship and decision-making. Good engineering design should not be deprived of the benefits of a broad spectrum of life experiences. It is time technology experts decide technology-based issues. Adequate familiarisation with societal demands is essential for practical technological literacy. But if new courses are added to the already overloaded curriculum, what could or should be removed? Or, should we think of revising the duration of the undergraduate programmes?

Engineering education needs reforms in faculty assessment, including teacher evaluation by students. How about evolving separate assessment criteria for engineering faculty from those of science faculty? Teaching skills often are not given due recognition in the assessment. Research skills are important, but more important are an engineering faculty's capability to teach and familiarity with the practical issues of "design under constraint". Engineering faculty needs to recognise the importance of life-long learning. Some of us may disagree, but many of our engineering faculty are not practising engineers.

Who should take the lead to bring the aforesaid changes? Engineering schools or industry or regulatory bodies? Not only students, teachers also need mentors. Indian National Academy of Engineering (INAE) can play a significant role in the revitalisation of engineering education. One of the INAE's recommendations (Gautam Biswas, KL Chopra, CS Jha, DV Singh: Profiles of engineering education in India) is to establish new institutions that need not be carbon copies of role model engineering institutions which were established 50 years ago.

The writer is a biotechnologist and E D, Birla Institute of Scientific Research, Jaipur
In India’s forgotten diseases, an opportunity

Innovative developing countries such as India have the capacity to produce a new generation of drugs, diagnostics, and vaccines.

Peter Hotez

India has the extraordinary opportunity to lead its leading government research institutes and pharmaceutical companies in a unique public-private partnership to address the diseases of the poor throughout South Asia.

Despite India’s dramatic modernization over the last decade, it remains “ground zero” for some of the world’s most ancient tropical diseases. A recent report in The Lancet reveals that 205,000 people in India die annually from leprosy, mainly in Orissa and the surrounding states of Chattisgarh and Jharkhand, with almost one-half of those deaths in children. Similarly, India and its South Asian neighbours account for one-quarter of the world’s intestinal worm infections such as hookworm and roundworm, and more than one-half of the world’s cases of elephantiasis, leprosy, and visceral leishmaniasis (VL). The State of Bihar alone accounts for a large percentage of the world’s cases of VL, a serious parasitic infection also known as kalaz-azar that affects the bone marrow, liver, and spleen, and is associated with high mortality. Thus, while much of the global health attention is largely focused on sub-Saharan Africa, the truth is that India and adjoining Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are just as devastated by neglected tropical diseases (NTDs).

A little known fact about NTDs is that they not only adversely affect the health of the poorest people in India and elsewhere, they also have the capability to contribute to poverty. For instance, the disfigurement and swelling of the limbs and genitals resulting from elephantiasis can result in loss of work or working effectively. Dr. K. D. Ramiah of the Indian Council of Medical Research in Pondicherry has estimated that India suffers almost $1 billion in annual economic losses as a result of this NTD. Similarly, chronic hookworm infection in occurring in over 70 million Indians stunts the growth and intellect of children to the point where a child’s future earning is reduced more than 40 percent. In the first-ever comprehensive assessment, reports of NTDs released in October, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that the economic burden of disease costs India $10 million annually. NTDs can impoverish entire families and communities. The bottom line is that NTDs are one of the reasons why India is trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty.

The good news is that India is beginning to fight back and show global leadership in solving its own NTD problem and, to some extent, the challenges of NTDs amongst its neighbouring countries. According to the World Health Organization, the Indian National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme has scaled its mass drug administration programme to treat 85 percent of the 600 million people at risk in India for leprosy. As a result, the overall prevalence of this disease in India has been cut in half since 2004, and there is the prospect that this ancient condition, which has affected the people of India for centuries, could be eliminated in the next decade. Similarly, India is aggressively implementing leprosy elimination through multi-drug therapy programs, while in 2006 the governments of Bangladesh, India, and Nepal signed a memorandum of understanding to eliminate kala-azar by 2015, with an emphasis on the border districts of these three countries where more than 50 percent of the cases occur. Another notable achievement for India was the elimination of yaws in 2006, a chronic infection affecting the skin, bone, and cartilage.

With these successes, India has the opportunity and indeed the moral obligation to take these NTD control and elimination activities to a higher level. India, together with nations such as Brazil and China, are sometimes referred to as innovative developing countries (IDCs). The concept of the IDC refers to the fact that while these countries may have chronic and debilitating poverty and high NTD prevalence, they also benefit from having top universities, medical research institutes and biotech companies. The track record of scientific publications and patents among the IDCs indicates that nations such as India have the capacity to produce a new generation of drugs, diagnostics, and vaccines for NTDs such as hookworm and kala-azar which require technologies in order to ensure that they can move towards disease elimination.

However, a great problem with new bio-pharmaceuticals for NTDs is that these products will almost certainly not become money makers. Almost by definition, NTDs occur exclusively among people living on less than $1.25 (or roughly Rs.56.4) per day. The people who need new NTD vaccines and treatments the most can never afford to pay for it. Hence, there is no financial incentive for India’s private industry to embark on research and development activities for NTDs. Therefore, India urgently needs a new strategy to link its government institutions and its powerful private bio-pharmaceutical companies together in a public-private partnership to stimulate innovation for the poor. Examples of this include a handful of non-profit product development partnerships (PDPs) supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and others. The PDPs include a joint venture between Merck & Co. and the U.K.’s Wellcome Trust, which is now being established in New Delhi. Brazil has set a strong example through two well-established public vaccine manufacturers, Fiocruz and Instituto Butantan, that collaborate with PDPs, including the Sabin Vaccine Institute, where I serve as president. As a result Brazil is producing a new generation of NTD vaccines.

The reason there are not more than a handful of PDPs is the dearth of adequate government funding specifically targeting PDPs as well as well-financed private philanthropies beyond the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In addition to increased support, there are formidable obstacles for applying complex technologies to solving global infectious disease problems, working with national regulatory authorities in low- and middle-income countries, and the difficulties of conducting clinical trials in resource poor settings.

Having had the pleasure of meeting the current and past leadership of the Indian Council of Medical Research, I know firsthand that a vision does exist that can link industry, government, and the PDPs in an innovative partnership to address diseases of poverty.

An Indian public-private partnership for NTDs could produce a new generation of drugs, diagnostics, and vaccines that will benefit all of South Asia and indeed the entire world’s “bottom billion”—the 1.4 billion people in the world who live in extreme poverty. Innovation for the poor could truly become India’s greatest gift to the world.

(Peter Hotez is president of the Sabin Vaccine Institute, a product development partnership for NTDs, which also hosts the Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases. He is the author of Forgotten People, Forgotten Diseases.)
MCI-appointed agency to conduct CETs

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The SC allowed MCI to go ahead with its decision to hold a single entrance test each for all MBBS and postgraduate seats in private and government medical colleges from 2011-12.

MCI’s counsel Amarendra Saran narrated the sequence of events leading to the notification by the SC bench of Justices R V Ravendra and A K Patnaik allowing the regulator to implement its December 27 notification. Saran, aided by petitioner Simran Jain’s counsel A D N Rao, had pleaded for a single entrance test to spare students from the harassment of appearing in 10-15 entrance tests every year. The CETs will be conducted by a nodal agency to be appointed by MCI in consultation with the Union government.

MCI had clarified that the state quota would remain intact as an entrance test would draw up a national merit list as well as statewise ranking list for general category, SC/ST and OBC and physically-challenged persons.

The MCI proposal said, “In order to be eligible for admissions to MBBS courses for a particular academic year, it shall be necessary for a candidate to obtain a minimum of 50% marks in each paper of the test.”

This year onwards, there will be a single exam each for MBBS and MD courses offered by all 271 medical colleges, 138 run by governments and 133 under private management. All these colleges offer over 31,000 seats for MBBS courses and another 11,000 seats for PG degrees.

More genes tied to heart risk found

Breakthrough To Help Identify Likely Victims, Boost Treatment

London: In what could soon pave the way for identifying people at risk from a future heart attack, an Indian-origin scientist-led team claims to have discovered over a dozen genes associated with coronary heart disease.

Nilesh Samani of the British Heart Foundation led the international team which analysed the genetic make-up of 140,000 people to find DNA faults in those susceptible to coronary heart disease. The scientists identified 13 new genes associated with the risk, doubling the number already known, findings they say could lead to new treatments for the disease and open the way of diagnosing those at risk from the condition in the future.

Samani said that most of the genes the team has identified were not previously known to be involved in the development of coronary heart disease.

“The most exciting thing about our study is that we have discovered several new genes not previously known to be involved in the development of coronary heart disease, which is the main cause of heart attacks.

“Understanding how these genes work, which is the next step, will vastly improve our knowledge of how the disease develops, and could ultimately help to develop new treatments,” he was quoted by The Daily Telegraph as saying.

The findings have been published in the latest edition of the 'Nature Genetics' journal.
Now, an app to meet all your pet dog's needs

Need a dog groomer? Looking for a trainer or nearby park? A new iPhone application provides canine information and also functions as a dog’s ID and medical and insurance cards. The “My Dog” app allows dog owners to create and share a personalized profile of their dogs, similar to Facebook, according to its creator. The profile includes a picture, description, information about the dog's owner and emergency contact information, as well as details on vaccinations and medical history. The data about the dog can be emailed or uploaded to a user's Facebook or Twitter account. The app can also serve as a dog-travel guide with listings of services such as dog-friendly hotels and the pet rules of US-based airlines and rail services.
Mom's blood test can tell if fetus has Down's syndrome

London: Scientists have developed a simple blood test to check unborn children for Down's syndrome, which they claim could save pregnant women from undergoing invasive tests that risk losing their baby.

The blood test has been developed by the scientists in Cyprus after they identified the key DNA difference that flags up Down's syndrome, a chromosomal condition caused by presence of all or part of an extra 21st chromosome. Infants with Down's syndrome, which is characterised by severe physical and mental impairments, have an extra copy of Chromosome 21. As DNA can cross the placenta from the baby to the mother, the blood test looks for chemical differences and extra chromosomes—a telltale defect in unborn babies.

The scientists believe the simple technique should be rolled out as a screening test in future, the Daily Express reported. Philippos Patsalis of the Cyprus Institute of Neurology and Genetics said, "The method is simple and fast and easy to perform in every genetic diagnostic lab worldwide because it does not require expensive equipment, software or special infrastructure. Such a non-invasive approach will avoid the risk of miscarriages of normal pregnancies caused by current, more invasive procedures." PTI
No comfy office, this IIM-B graduate is an ‘aam’ admi

Sruthy Susan Ullas | TNN

Bangalore: He will pass out of one of the most sought-after B-schools of the country. While 332 of his friends will get into those cushy jobs, he will work closer to Mother earth — working with farmers and help them produce export-quality fruits and vegetables and finally export them.

Ashutosh Sawant, a PGP second year student, has started a firm which looks at exporting frozen fruits like alphonso mangoes, frozen strawberry, pomegranate arils, frozen vegetables and cauliflower florets.

“The main reason why our products could not be exported was because we used farming methods that were unacceptable in other countries — like using banned pesticides. I will work closely with farmers, help them with best practices and finally export the produce,” Ashutosh said.

Ashutosh has already started his pilot projects. Back at his hometown in Kada- goan, Karad taluk, Maharashtra, he has entered into a contract with the owner of a 150-acre mango grove. “I helped the farmers with the technical knowhow like drip irrigation and use of chemicals. They do not have access to such knowledge. I consulted with the Central Food Technological Research Institute. The first produce is almost ready,” he said.

The total value addition to fruits and vegetables in India is less — around 4% — compared to global standards of 45%-50%, he points out. “I have seen my uncle sell pomegranates for Rs 8 a kilo when I buy for Rs 60 here in Bangalore. We produce 80% of world’s pomegranates and export just 2%. Lots of them are being wasted, this provides an opportunity to process them,” he says.

Once the produce is there, he will look at marketing it to retail chains in other continents. The processing involves cleaning them from chemicals, cutting them according to the specifications of the client and packing in refrigerated containers.
Medical fraternity hails verdict

Mumbai/New Delhi: The Supreme Court verdict dismissing the plea for mercy killing of a nurse was on Monday welcomed by the medical fraternity, including nurses looking after the comatose sexual assault victim, which cautioned that any move to legalise active euthanasia was fraught with dangers.

"India is not mature enough to handle euthanasia," senior Bengaluru-based cardiologist Devi Prasad Shetty said while expressing his happiness over the verdict on a mercy killing plea.

"It will definitely prevent many more premature deaths and people trying to take advantage of euthanasia," he said. Shetty’s view was shared by Chief Cardiologist of Bombay Hospital B K Goyal, who said euthanasia is an emotional issue which can be "misused.

"The subject of euthanasia is very emotional. When we call it mercy killing, there cannot be mercy and then killing. The two words don't go together," he said and likened it to permitting medical termination of pregnancy (MTP). There was joy among Aruna's former colleagues and nurses in local KEM hospital who have been tending to her. TNN

Not a waste of energy

The concept of the rebound effect is not a new one. Its original name, in fact, is the Jevons paradox, named after English economist William Stanley Jevons. In a book published in 1865, Jevons took a look at advances in the technology of coal-consuming industries and machinery, making them more efficient. But instead of decreasing coal consumption, Jevons showed that a reduction in the price of coal led to increased consumption.

This effect has been observed in many industrial and consumer situations. For example, the introduction of more efficient lighting bulbs led to increased electricity consumption because people felt they could afford to use more light. Similarly, the use of more fuel-efficient cars led to increased fuel consumption as people drove more.

The rebound effect is often cited as a reason why simply increasing energy efficiency may not be sufficient to reduce overall energy consumption. To truly reduce energy use, it is necessary to consider not just the efficiency of individual technologies, but the overall system in which they are used.

Make energy cost more

The concept of the rebound effect is not a new one. Its original name, in fact, is the Jevons paradox, named after English economist William Stanley Jevons. In a book published in 1865, Jevons took a look at advances in the technology of coal-consuming industries and machinery, making them more efficient. But instead of decreasing coal consumption, Jevons showed that a reduction in the price of coal led to increased consumption.

This effect has been observed in many industrial and consumer situations. For example, the introduction of more efficient lighting bulbs led to increased electricity consumption because people felt they could afford to use more light. Similarly, the use of more fuel-efficient cars led to increased fuel consumption as people drove more.

The rebound effect is often cited as a reason why simply increasing energy efficiency may not be sufficient to reduce overall energy consumption. To truly reduce energy use, it is necessary to consider not just the efficiency of individual technologies, but the overall system in which they are used.
Flexi hrs passe, Gen-Net working is new rage

Namrata Singh & Samidha Sharma

Mumbai Over the years, companies have accelerated their innovation processes in technology, marketing, cost-cutting and finance to drive business growth. But it was only a few years back that firms started developing new practices of driving gendered diversity within an aim to develop and retain women employees. Even as companies like Flexi-work hours, career breaks and child care are still being experimented with by a larger number of firms, some have jumped on to second-generation programmes to tackle invisible barriers in the process of skill development and employee retention.

Last month, after a brainstorming session involving 20 employees of Hindustan Unilever (HUL) and members of its leadership team, a women's network called Gen-Net (gender-balanced net) was unveiled.

The discussion resulted in the creation of a gender balance council comprising senior employees to drive the gender balance agenda in the company. A women's network would essentially provide an opportunity for employees to come together and expand their professional and social networks to strengthen their professional development and business careers.

According to HUL's executive director HR, Leena Nair, Unilever's commitment on gender balance is unequivocal and India is a key market where the organization needs to move the needle. "This would require an overhaul of policies and a clear roadmap on how to develop and retain women across the organizational pyramid. "In our experience, mentoring and employee networks are two key interventions that can help drive inclusion and learn from experiences of peers and other successful role models," said Nair.

Standard Chartered Bank too has started a similar programme titled 'Identity Explorer', which is an experiential learning programme for women and is an attempt to understand what is really important to them. The objective is to help employees understand their identity markers and accordingly build skills for success careers.

"Through this session, we intend to provide our women employees with an opportunity to interact directly with senior executives within and outside the bank. The programme is aimed at understanding the dynamics and challenges which women go through, whether they should opt for a career or family, they self-analyse in this group," said Madhulika Lal, regional head of Human Resources, India & South Asia, Standard Chartered Bank.

Going by the response in Mumbai, it is looking to take the programme across all centres. The idea behind such programmes can be explained by what Lal has to say—"that women in this forum share their thoughts in a very non threatening environment".

In any large organization, building networks and influencing multiple stakeholders is critical to being effective. "While men find their own formal and informal ways to network, not all women do this very effectively. Some tend to look down upon it as a waste of time and even feel awkward and embarrassed. This network has a significant role in legitimizing and urging women to come together," said Nair.

Woman CEO missing in Indian IT

Shilpa Phadnis & Sujit John

Bangalore: Try to think of a woman CEO in Indian IT and your guess is you will struggle. Neeraj Bhawan, MD of HP India, may come quickly to mind. But after that, it’s not easy. Capgemini recently promoted Aruna Jayanthi, its global delivery officer for outsourcing, as its CEO for India. Akila Krishnamurthy has been head of SBIard India for some years now.

At the next CIO level, it’s only a little better. In an industry where over 50% of the employees are women, and which boasts of almost 50% of its new hires in recent times being women, the near absence of women at the top may appear odd.

But it isn’t difficult to understand. Most Indian women still value their roles at home. Many times, a woman simply mentions career blocks to prioritize home over work. "A CIO’s job involves being available 24/7. It’s not the capability issue, but availability issue," says Kailash Benerji, CEO of Absolute IT. Ganesh Sharma, partner & country head, human capital at KPMG Advisory, says when it comes to composition of boards, peers impact the choice of other members. "The senior, aged board members are averse to the younger lot, and definitely women at that. Traditional business houses prefer their own family as board members. They are quite uncomfortable with external women directors on their board asking them questions," Sharma says.

But there are signs that situation is changing for women. Sumita Cheryan, GM for talent engagement and development at Wipro Technologies, says that as the number of women in the corporate sector has grown, so has their ambitions.
20 नए आईआईआईटी केंद्रों पर काम शुरू

योजना आयोग

चौथी सदस्यी समिति

बीजी 25 पदवियों को केंद्र सरकार ने 6 स्वदेशी एक धिक्का समिति का माध्यम किया। जिसमें स्थलपति के दौरान, मौकाम यह सम्मान आईआईआईटी और स्वदेशी समाज के प्रतिनिधियों को शामिल किया गया।

इस समिति का काम यह है कि प्रस्तावित आईआईआईटी के खिलाफ किया जाने का प्रतिबंध। यह समिति उन भूमिकाएं और उद्देश्यों पर निर्धारित करेगी जहां आईआईआईटी दूर किया जा सकते हैं।

इसके बाद इस समिति की तिथियों को अधिकतम रूप से रोकने का देश का विशेषज्ञा करेगा।

इस प्रस्ताव को प्रस्तुत करने के लिए संसद में ही सरकार में विभिन्न नेताओं के दौरान अधिकारी के अन्य दृष्टिकोण के साथ-साथ उक्ति की गई।

आयोग की दृष्टि करने के लिए इस केंद्र दूरी के राज्यों में शुरू हो, जहां ये अभी नहीं हैं। 

इसने कुछ राज्य सरकारों से बातचीत की है जिसे भारतीय उद्योग की सुधित करना है।

इसके लिए इसने इंडस्ट्री के प्रतिनिधियों से भी बात कहा कर दी है।

इंडस्ट्री के विभिन्न भाग में 128 कोड के खिलाफ निर्णय निर्माण किया जाएगा जिनके लिए केंद्र सरकार, राज्य सरकार और इंडस्ट्री 50:35:15 के आधार पर पैसे समायोजित होंगे।

आयोग के उपरांत इसकी नींव की है कि सरकार के आयोगों में हालांकि केंद्र सरकार की तारीफ़ प्रतिस्पर्धा (57.5 राज्य) लोकतान्त्रिक इंडस्ट्री को प्रतिस्पर्धा 7.5 प्रतिशत लगाते हैं के लिए तैयार कराने का पूरा करेगी। इस नींव में उत्तर रहा है इंडस्ट्री, ज्यादा पैसा, अधिक और वर्गीयता में आईआईआईटी करने होंगे।