



## MCI says it can't make pvt med colleges pay interns

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The Medical Council of India (MCI), the apex regulatory body for medical education, has refused to intervene in the issue of private medical colleges in Karnataka not paying MBBS students a stipend during their one-year internship, saying this was beyond its purview. The MCI was looking into a complaint from Karnataka about non-payment of internship allowance. This could mean crores of rupees being saved by private colleges. Just one private college in Karnataka with 150 seats would save Rs 3.6 crore per year given the fact that the state government mandates Rs 20,000 per month as the stipend.

The minutes of the MCI executive committee (EC) held on September 26 this year show that the EC did not approve the Academic Committee's recommendation on the issue and stated that "Graduate Medical Education (GME) Regulations 1997 do not provide for payment of stipend to the interns" and that the issue was beyond the purview of the council.

Interestingly, the MCI's Post Graduate Medical Education (PGME) Regulation 2000 has a clause stipulating that post-graduate students will be paid the same stipend



MCI was hearing a complaint from a Karnataka student about non-payment of stipend

as in state government-owned medical institutions. No such clause exists in the GME rules.

It is not unknown for the MCI to amend rules where it feels the need. For instance, in 2014 it proactively changed the Code of Ethics Regulations 2002 in February 2014 to take away its own power to regulate doctors' associations, thus allowing them to take money as sponsorship from pharma companies. Yet, despite several complaints from hapless MBBS interns from various states, the council has not changed the GME regulations to make it mandatory for medical colleges to pay stipend to them.

Most states with private medical colleges have been grappling with the issue of many of them paying MBBS interns or even resident doctors meagre or no stipends.

Many others take a lump-sum from students as "internship fee" and return most of it to them as monthly stipends, after deducting hefty amounts as hostel and mess fees. There have been several strikes and court cases as interns feel cheated since they work long hours in the hospital with hardly any days off.

MCI president Dr Jayshree Mehta told TOI that stipend payment was a state prerogative and that the GME regulations were "silent on the issue". The EC overruled the academic committee's recommendations for stipend to be paid because it has to take decisions within the ambit of the regulations, she said.

In most states, private colleges pay vastly varying amounts as stipend, often well below what is stipulated by the government. In Kerala, the actual amount paid ranges from Rs 4,500 to Rs 12,000 against the Rs 20,000 fixed by the government. In Tamil Nadu, it ranges from Rs 2,500 to Rs 10,000 though the government stipulates Rs 15,000. Despite many such violations being brought to their notice, governments and medical councils at the states and centre have turned a blind eye to these. That appears to have emboldened some private medical colleges to altogether stop paying stipend.