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## WHAT'S UP, DOCS!

By Raju Vernekar

Over 4,500 doctors, whose registrations have been cancelled for one year by the Maharashtra government for their alleged failure to serve in rural areas, have sought clarification about whether the DMER offered them jobs, at all, in rural areas as it alleges that the doctors have refused to accept them.

"Being Doctors", a forum representing the doctors, has filed a RTI application, seeking detailed information from the Directorate of Medical Education and Research (DMER), about when the jobs were offered and which doctors refused to accept them.

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Speaking to The Afternoon D&C, Dr Deepak Chaturvedi, President, "Being Doctors" said, "We have filed the RTI application, three weeks back and are awaiting a reply, because that will clarify the position of the DMER. The DMER will have to give the names

of doctors and dates on which they were directed to join and the names of the rural hospitals they were sent to. Basically no jobs were offered and the doctors are being targeted who are very much part of the society. Based on the reply to our query, we will move the court. The action taken by DMER is unilateral. Besides, the DMER should also explain how the amount of penalty; Rs 10 lakh for a MBBS, Rs 50 lakh for post-graduates and Rs 2 crore for super-specialty doctors, was arrived at".

"Basically there had been no communication from either the DMER or the Maharashtra Medical Council (MMC) about rural postings earlier. MMC issued a circular on June 30, directing doctors, directing graduates, post-graduates and super specialty degree and diploma holders from government or municipal corporation-run medical colleges to submit their one-year 'bond-free certificate' for renewal of registration. Subsequently early last month, the registration of the doctors had been cancelled. But the MMC act has no provision to cancel the

"The Government has also been saying that the doctors, whose registrations have not been renewed would be called bogus doctors and will invite legal action. This is absolutely arbitrary, because time and again, the government has failed to give postings to doctors who opted to serve the bonds. Nobody is complaining about working in rural areas, but the real issue is poor infrastructure at primary health centres."

"We want the government to set up a committee comprising retired judges and policy makers to study the matter and come out with guidelines about the rural postings. After completing education for three and half years, the government can fix internship of two years, which could comprise a one year compulsory posting in rural areas."

The requirement of a one year bond is not applicable to ayurveda or homeopathy students. Then no one knows why only allopathic students are targeted. This way, one day there will be a huge shortage of allopathic doctors in Maharashtra.

The Maharashtra government is planning to retrospectively implement the mandatory rural service bond for MBBS students who had taken admission to the course in 2010. An online list would be compiled of the students completing their medical education, for their requirements in rural, semi-rural and tribal areas.

In another development the state government is also planning to tweak the duration of the MBBS course to 6.5 years from the existing 5.5, in order to leave no room for students to dodge rural postings. Under the proposal, a one year bond of rural service will be merged with the course and the students will be awarded degrees only after completion of their one year rural service.