India approves new dental schools

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India: The Minister of Health and Family Welfare in India, Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad, has approved 150 educational institutions, including a significant number of medical and dental colleges. He also directed the country's Medical and Dental Councils to take up pending recommendations of colleges as soon as possible so that semesters could begin by 1 August, the newspaper the Times of India reports. In India, each institute offering medical or dental education needs annual clearance from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare based on recommendations by the two councils.

Officials have justified the large number of approvals by the many applications that had been pending approval for several years and numerous public complaints of undue delay in the processing of cases. However, the approvals come at a time when there is growing concern for the future employment of dental graduates. According to a Times of India report, many dental graduates in India are forced to quit dentistry and work in other, more lucrative jobs.

Education regulators have also been said to turn a blind eye to quality in their haste to recognise private professional institutions. Azad made clear that no intermediaries would be tolerated in his ministry for clearing any medical institute application. He asked for complaint boxes to be placed at his office and residents to receive complaints against any person seeking illegal endorsement, either in medical councils or in the Ministry.

“What is needed in India is a national workforce strategy that is carefully devised and implemented,” Prof. Raman Bedi, former Chief Dental Officer in the UK and founder of the new Indian dental community Dentalguru, told Dental Tribune Asia Pacific. “With higher demands for quality dentistry by local people, dental tourism, postgraduate training opportunities etc., many dentists will stay in India instead of going abroad.”

Dental education in India has grown in recent years and India now ranks first in the world in having the highest number of dental schools. The country has 280 dental institutions, which produce between 15,000 and 20,000 Bachelor of Dental Surgery graduates every year.