

India to start specialisation in infectious diseases

India is to start training doctors to specialise in infectious diseases like dengue and chikungunya that killed many and affected thousands last year.

The National Board of Examinations (NBE), an autonomous body under the health ministry, is planning to start fellowship courses in infectious diseases.

'There is a growing realisation of the need to have more specialists for handling different infectious diseases in the wake of the recent epidemics of dengue and chikungunya,' said A. Rajasekaran, president of the National Board of Examination.

'We have in principle agreed to a proposal brought to us by a team of Indian American doctors and infectious diseases experts in India to start a post-doctoral fellowship for higher specialisation,' Rajasekaran told IANS.

Dengue and chikungunya are both mosquito-borne viral diseases. Dengue is characterised by high fever and body ache and can lead to death when the platelet counts drop. Chikungunya brings on high fever and pain in limb joints.

The work for commencing the fellowships - including hospital infection and HIV - will start soon after the institutions are identified. The fellowships will then be offered to the doctors who have completed their post-graduation.

India currently has very few overseas-trained doctors with specialisation in handling infectious diseases.

'The programme will be introduced along with several other post-doctoral courses for intensive care in oncology, cardiac, paediatrics and spine among others. The NBE is also planning to focus more on the need for better awareness about infectious diseases among young doctors,' Rajasekaran said.

The course is expected to create a better understanding of infectious diseases for medical students.

It was stressed at a recent seminar involving Indian American doctors that infectious disease is one area that needs better handling in India.

Medical experts have warned that lack of more specialists may soon lead to more and more people developing drug resistance due to wrong treatment or misuse of antibiotics.

'Unlike in the US, where specialisation in infectious disease is being practised for decades, the same is not getting proper attention in India. As a result, while there are 6,500 infectious disease specialists in the US, India has only a handful of doctors with similar specialisation,' Shah said.

'Patients with AIDS, cancer or transplantations are also prone to infectious diseases. These patients often require highly trained specialists for their treatments,' Shah told IANS during a visit to New Delhi.

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