



Editorial

National exit test (NExT) for medical students: A high goal to achieve

Amruta Dashputra^{1,*}

¹Dept. of Pharmacology, NKP Salve Institute of Medical Sciences & Research Centre, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India



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The Government of India introduced the NMC act and a new entrance exam for medical undergraduates, NExT came into picture. The National Exit Test was introduced in the National Medical Commission Bill of 2019.¹

1. Purpose

It is felt that there has been a decline in the quality of medical training with the increase number of medical colleges and insufficient medical teachers. Therefore, there is a need to implement strict regulations and norms to ensure that medical graduates are competent to practise. Indian medical graduates should undergo an exit test which motivate graduates to be of equal standards, nationally.²

The National Medical License Examination has been a core component in many countries.³ The purpose of conducting the licensure for medical graduates is to ensure that qualified graduates have the knowledge and skills necessary to practise medicine safely and effectively. This examination will aim at ensuring that every medical graduate is competent to practise medicine as a doctor as well as pursue postgraduate (PG) studies.⁴

2. Aim

To improve the quality of the Indian Medical Health System.

3. Objectives of the NExT

1. To ensure a qualified and skilled Indian medical graduate.
2. To permit foreign medical graduates to register with the NMC and practise medicine in India.
3. To serve as a common eligibility test for admission to PG medical courses in India. This examination will subsequently replace the NEET for PG (NEET-PG).^{1,5,6}

Indian Medical Association-Medical Students Network⁷ has given suggestion for the NExT examination as follows:

1. There will be 'uniformity' for MBBS final year part 2 examination dates across all the medical institutes in India, thus helping UGs to prepare for the NExT with clarity.
2. The NExT examination will be conducted twice a year, i.e. in March and April.
3. Applicants qualifying the first part should be eligible to pursue their internship programme.
4. The second level examination for NExT should make the applicant eligible for admission to a PG course as well as practise as a medical practitioner in India.
5. Level one of the NExT should be via an online portal.
6. In case the applicant appears for the examination twice, then the higher of the two marks should be taken into consideration.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: avdashputra@gmail.com (A. Dashputra).

NExT is going to be implemented from September 2024. At present few guidelines regarding NExT Exam is published.⁸

4. NExT Exam Pattern

1. NExT-1(Theory)

- Theory questions based on multiple-choice questions (MCQs)
- NExT-1 will be conducted after the final year MBBS before the internship.
- The scores of NExT-1 will help to gain a PG seat after internship. Thus, NExT-1 will be a qualifying, as well as a competitive exam.
- The Score will be valid for 2 to 3 years for the PG Entrance ranking.
- This will include major subjects, minor subjects, and allied subjects.

2. NExT-2(Practical)

- Students who successfully pass NExT-1 will be eligible for NExT 2
- Which is comprises oral and practical examinations at the end of the internship.
- NExT-2 will be a pass/fail type of exam.
- Marks in NExT-2 will not contribute to PG seat allocation.
- There will be unlimited attempts in the NExT exam.

4.1. Highlights of exam pattern

- NExT examination for MBBS will be held for 3 days.
- The examination paper for NExT entrance is divided into 6 parts.
- Every day consists of a morning pre-lunch session of 3 hours and an afternoon post-lunch session of 1.5 hours.
- NExT 1 exam will contain MCQs, whereas NExT 2 will be an oral and practical examination).
- NExT 1 will be online procured, and NExT 2 will be offline.
- The total duration of exams will be 13 hours 30 minutes (4.5 hours/day).
- The clinical subjects would carry more marks compared to the pre-clinical and para-clinical subjects.
- NExT 1 exam will contain 540 MCQs. Out of which, 60% is problem-solving, 30% is comprehension and analysis, and 10% is recalled.

4.2. Eligibility criteria

- Any student can apply for the NExT exams irrespective of nationality. Indian Nationals, OCIs, NRIs, PIOs, and foreign nationals are eligible for the NExT exit test.
- Only those medical students who have completed their compulsory internship by March 31st, 2023, are eligible to appear for the NEET PG examination.

A recent Union Health Ministry gazette statement highlights that the regulations for conducting the proposed common examination would not be in place yet. The formation of the examination cell is under process.

No timeline has been shared officially, but the exam has been extended till September 2024.

Still, stakeholders are in uncertainty, having confusion and anxiety regarding NExT. Most of the doctors wanted 'pan-India entrance and exit exams for the medical course' and that an 'exit exam can will eliminate the incompetent doctors. According to students this exit exam is an extra burden for them.'⁷ Here by implementing NExT, NMC trying to standardise medical education and making our doctors globally acceptable. On other side central and state government allowing practice of modern medicine to doctors of other pathies.

It is big challenge for NMC to conduct NExT smoothly, uniformly, at a same time without any biased that too all over India. Implementation of this such type of examination will require tremendous coordination manpower and money. This process may be time-consuming and unnecessary delay the post graduate admissions process.

The introduction of a NExT is welcome by most of medical fraternity as a good initiative to help standardize the training outcomes of medical graduates irrespective of the university or college. It will help make the Indian medical graduate a globally relevant clinician.

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Author biography

Amruta Dashputra, Associate Professor

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