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'Phil'ing in the gap

The Philippines is touted to be the next favoured destination for medical studies abroad after Russia and China. Himika Chaudhuri has the details

Students, tutors and government officials are being rounded up since last week in connection with admission to a top medical college in the city. This has proved yet again that parents and students are ready to go to any length to secure a berth in a medical college and to get a medical degree. But rather than getting caught up in an illegal case and shelling out precious lakhs, parents can now exercise a more credible option. The government of Philippines, has for the first time this year, allowed Indian students to be admitted to medical courses in their country. Starting this year, seven Universities of Philippines will admit students from India for their medical courses. The four-and-a-half year course will cost students between Rs 8 and 8.5 lakh for tuition depending on the University they choose.

"Many students want to pursue a degree abroad to get the international exposure, but unfortunately the inhibitive costs in the US and UK often deter students, however, the cost of medical education in Philippines is at par with any private medical colleges in India, if not less," asserts Cecelia Reyes, dean of administration and international operations, Emilio Aguinaldo college in Manila. Apparently even the living costs are similar to those in India. "A student would have to pay around Rs 5,000

a month for living and food," adds Reyes. Possibly in a bid to attract more students in the initial years of admissions, the government has allowed universities to admit candidates who have an aggregate of 50 per cent in physics, chemistry and biology in their class XII board exams. The fifty four-month course has been developed as a combination of theoretical and practical modules followed by a year of internship at a hospital there. "However, in Philippines unless one has a post graduate degree in medicine he's not considered a doctor, but with that MBBS degree one can practice in India," says Ditipriya Sarkar, director, operations of HCMI — an international organisation that helps students through the admission process to these universities. In Kolkata, the organisation has set up its office in Salt Lake and is now helping students get through the session in September. Students can also opt for sessions in January and June every year.

UNIVERSITIES OFFERING MBBS COURSES

- University of Northern Philippines
- Davao Medical School Foundation
- Cagayan State University
- Our Lady of Fatima University
- Emilio Aguinaldo College
- University of East Ramon Magsaysay
- Tarlac State University

PLUSES OF STUDYING IN PHILIPPINES

- Medium of instruction is English
- Weather is similar to India
- Similarities in food habits and culture

Once the students get admission in one of the universities, they will have to apply for a no-objection certificate from the Medical Council of India. This has been made mandatory by the government since 2003 if the student wants to practice in India after finishing the course.

► continued on page 7

'Phil'ing in the gap



— Continued from page 1

"STUDENTS must ensure that they take the NOC from here otherwise they will not be allowed to take the screening test here, which means they will not be able to work in India," says Dr. Prabir Kumar Sur, executive committee member, MCI. While giving the NOC, the MCI checks if the universities are admitting students with a minimum of 50 per cent in aggregate in the plus II

board exams and if the University is enlisted in the World Directory of Universities. "If the student leaves with the NOC then the government is bound to allow the student to take the screening test once they are back," adds Sur.

The MCI takes a screening test once the student comes back armed with a MBBS degree from the Philippines. Those who pass the screening test are given an Indian registration after a one year of internship in a government hospital here. Besides applying for the MCI test, students who finish their degree from there will also be allowed to apply as practicing doctors in the US as well. They just have to take a screening test there,"

explains Sarkar. In fact, the last six months of the course is dedicated to training the young doctors to crack the screening tests in India, US or any other country.

Besides, work opportunities are also available in the Philippines itself. But do top hospitals in India hire doctors passing out from those universities? "Yes," say heads of some top private hospitals, provided the student is allowed to take the MCI screening test. "If the course is recognised by MCI, we will surely hire them provided they clear our own interview and test," says Dr. Rupali Basu, GM, Wockhard Hospital. Well, seems like the fight for that medical seat has gotten little easier.