

Philippines offers cheap & best medical education

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As growing number of Nepalis leave the country for higher education, Health Management International (HCMI) - a Singapore-based global healthcare recruitment and educational network - has ventured into Nepal to lure and counsel students aspiring to be doctors to the leading Philippines universities.

It introduced a veritable set of medical curriculum at the eleven Philippines universities for MBBS degree in Nepal last week. "For this year's session starting in September, we target to take in 500 students," said Baljit Singh, managing director of HCMI.

Talking to the *Post*, he elaborated that the cost of pursuing MBBS in the Philippines was affordable compared to India, Bangladesh and even private medical colleges of Nepal. It stands in a range of 24,000 to 30,000 US dollar for five and a half years, and the cost of living is 120 dollar per month including the cost of lodging.

The names of the universities HCMI has included into its service list are University of Northern Philippines, Davao Medical School Foundation, Cagayan State University, Our Lady of Fatima University, Emilio Aguinaldo College, University of the East Ramon Magasaysay and Tarlac State University.

All these universities are

sponsored through the Commission for Higher Education (CHED), which is the Education Ministry of the Philippines. The curriculum is recognized by the World Health Organization and also the US Department of Education.

Singh further said that Nepal came into focus of HCMI after it received several enquiries for the MBBS program. "We received a number of enquiries from Nepal through our offices located in India and Dhaka. It encouraged us to come to Nepal," said he.

Referring that Nepal has MBBS program seats of just about 1,000, Singh said that the number is very low compared to the number of doctors the country required to serve the people. "A lot of students aspire to be doctors, but they do not get chance to pursue MBBS due to limited seats quota in Nepal. Those who can afford ultimately go abroad for the study. We want to tap that prospect," said Singh.

However, HCMI has not just the enrollment interest in Nepal. Singh said the company wishes to have longer-term business partnership in Nepal on the health sector. The company has opened HCMI Education in order to extend its services and establish broader alliance with the healthcare

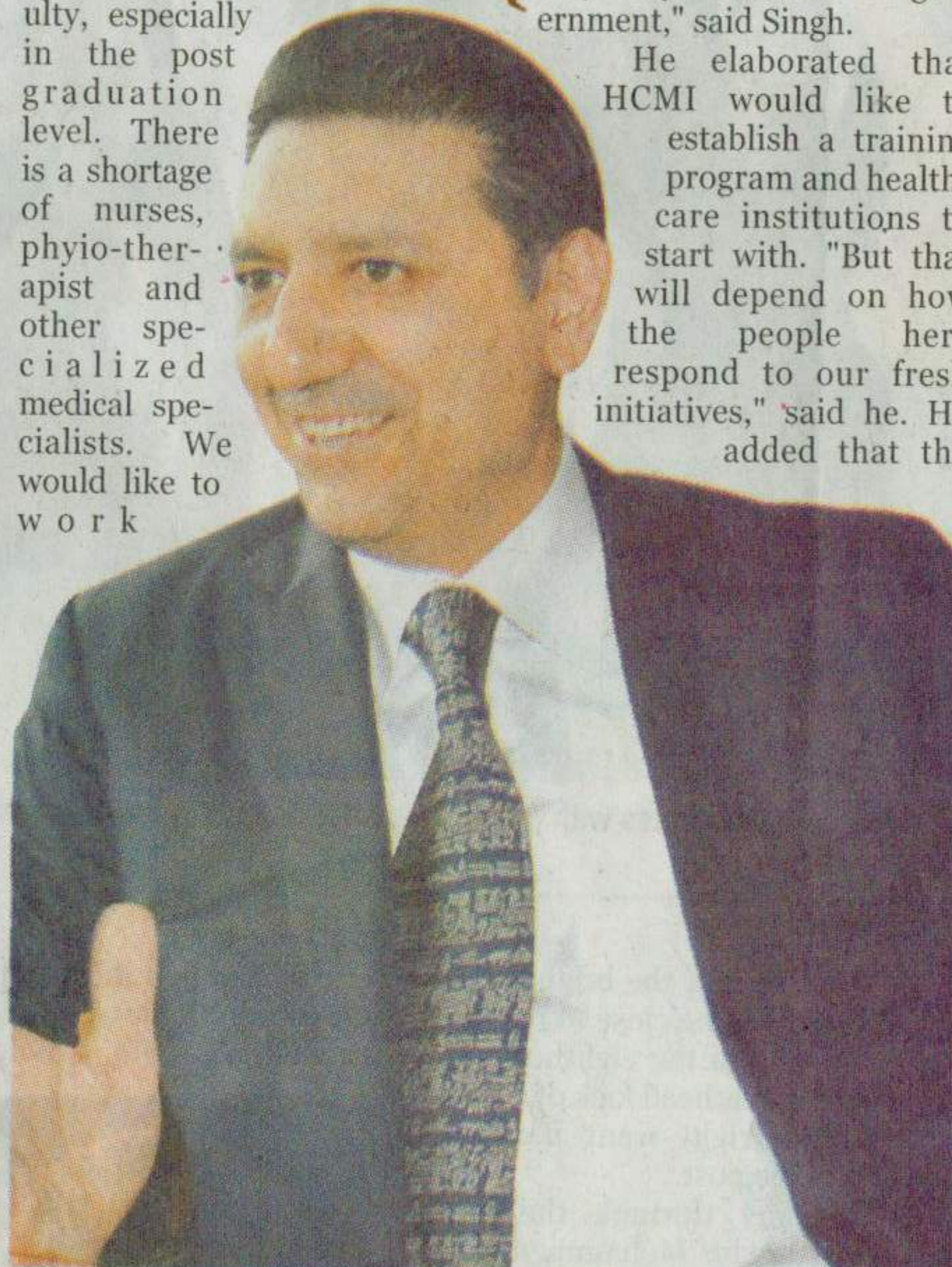
institutions and the government. During his visit to Kathmandu, Singh and his team from HCMI interacted with the government officials, medical council officials and the Education Minister.

"Doctor to patient ratio in Nepal is very high. There is a severe deficiency of quality faculty, especially in the post graduation level. There is a shortage of nurses, physio-therapist and other specialized medical specialists. We would like to work

together with the government to bridge this gap," said Singh.

Although a private sector institution, HCMI works with the Philippines' education ministry and is authorized to deal on health education services on behalf of CHED. "We are exploring the areas wherein we can jointly work with the government," said Singh.

He elaborated that HCMI would like to establish a training program and healthcare institutions to start with. "But that will depend on how the people here respond to our fresh initiatives," said he. He added that the



government should also realize that it is in the best of interest of Nepal that foreign players venture into the healthcare services.

"We expect the government to assess the country's healthcare requirements and facilitate the alliance building process," said Singh, adding that the Philippines can provide training facilities and launch special training courses at its training hospitals or in Nepal, exchange faculties and support Nepal in dealing with present shortage of medical professionals and other specialized healthcare manpower.

Moreover, he stated the HCMI was also considering to provide scholarships to the deserving students pursuing MBBS in the Philippines. "We will have that in the future," said he, adding that the Philippines has students from Bangladesh, India, the US, Korea and Hong Kong, among others.

Philippines education is founded on the US system and there are various advantages of studying in the Philippines, according to Singh. "It is an English speaking country. The cost of education is lower. Quality of education is much high, well supported by a good infrastructure and excellent education system," said he. (PR)

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