

## General Studies-2; Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### Allowing non-allopathic doctors to perform surgery

#### Introduction

- Recently a government notification listed out specific surgical procedures that a postgraduate medical student of Ayurveda must be “practically trained to acquaint with, as well as to independently perform”.
- The notification invited sharp criticism from the Indian Medical Association, which questioned the competence of Ayurveda practitioners to carry out these procedures.

#### Current Debate

- The current debate revolves around the **Central Council of Indian Medicine** issuing amendments to the Indian Medicine Central Council (Post Graduate Ayurvedic Education) Regulations, 2016, to allow postgraduates students in Ayurveda undergoing ‘Shalya’ (general surgery) and ‘Shalakya’ (dealing with eye, ear, nose, throat, head and neck, oro-dentistry) to perform 58 specified surgical procedures.
- This was immediately opposed by many allopathic professionals, with the Indian Medical Association (IMA) decrying it as a mode of allowing mixing of systems of medicine by using terms from allopathy.

#### How far is surgery part of Ayurveda?

- Various Ayurveda practitioners have claimed that performing surgery has been an integral part of Ayurveda since the time of Sushruta.
- Sushruta Samhita has, apart from descriptions of illnesses and cures, also detailed accounts of surgical procedures and instruments.

#### Doctors serving in Rural Areas

- The **shortage and unwillingness of allopathic doctors, including surgeons, to serve in rural areas is a chronic issue.**
- According to the 2019 Rural Health Statistics, there is a shortfall of 1,484 allopathic doctors in all of India’s primary health centres (PHCs).
- The government has tried to address this by mechanisms such as
  - rural bonds,
  - a quota for those who have served in rural service in postgraduate seats,
  - a plan to work on increasing the number of medical colleges and postgraduate seats.
- We need to address this gap by **evidence-based approaches**, such as task-sharing, supported by efficient and quality referral mechanisms.

#### Utilising Ayurveda Doctors

- Ayurveda graduates including surgeons are a large workforce.
- If they are creatively and properly trained, they can play important roles in our health-care system and improve access to decent health care for the citizens.
- On site or ambulance care of trauma victims is in a state of disorder in India.
- Given the right training, pay and identity, Ayurvedic surgeons can be trained to strengthen this service and save hundreds of lives.

### **Way Forward**

- Whether the surgeries conducted in Ayurvedic medical colleges and hospitals have the same standards and outcomes as allopathic institutions requires explication and detailed formal enquiry, in the interest of patient safety.
- Patients have a right to know and understand who their surgeon would be, what system of medicine they belong to, and their expertise and level of training.
- There should not be a difference in quality of care between urban and rural patients — everyone deserves a right to quality and evidence-based care from trained professionals.