

More pay to lure docs to villages

Govt may also increase their retirement age to 65

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After health minister Anbumani Ramadoss's plans for compulsory rural stint for medical students drew flak, the government is now planning to give an attractive pay package to doctors to woo them to villages. Based on the recommendations of a task group constituted under the National Rural Health Mission, the health ministry is actively considering a proposal to enhance the salaries by one-third for the doctors who work in rural areas. Besides the hike, it may also increase their retirement age to 65 years and give a posting near their hometown.

Right now, there is a shortage of 1410 doctors at primary health centres (PHCs) while 7,352 PHCs are functioning without lab technicians. Despite 31,000 medical graduates

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passing out every year and 683,582 registered allopathic doctors, only one in 10 works in a rural area.

The health ministry had set up a task group headed by Director General of Health Services to recommend measures to ensure the services of doctors in rural areas. The group has also recommended hiring of doctors on contractual basis through walk-in-interviews and decentralisation of recruitment at the district level. The central government, under NHRM, provides funds for upgradation and strengthening of the PHCs and contractual appointment of its staff.

Though Indian Medical Association (IMA) welcomed the move it suggested measures like extra tax benefits to woo the doctors. "There should be extra incentives for doctors working in villages. For example, rural doctors going for post graduation should be given preference and fee relaxation," said Narendra Saini, spokesperson for IMA.

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