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Pakistan Medical Commission to Subsidize Registration Fees of the National Licensing Examination

The members of the Medical and Dental Council headed by Dr. Arshad Taqi, President met with a delegation of medical students to discuss the National Licensing Examination (NLE) to allow them to put forth their concerns and view. At the request of the Council Dr. Faisal Sultan, SAPM, Pakistan and the Chairman National Medical & Dental Academic Board also attended the discussion.

The students at the outset agreed in principle with the concept of NLE and acknowledged the need for such an examination to improve the quality of healthcare services and its requirement as part of the upcoming global WFME requirements. However, the primary issue of the students with of the NLE being made mandatory upon them and sought the Council's indulgence to exempt them and some future graduating classes from the NLE to include either all those enrolled in medical colleges at this time or at least until 2023. The main reasoning for seeking the exemption from NLE was that it would amount to a retrospective imposition as when they were admitted to medical college there was no such requirement to obtain a license. The other main concern was that they felt they would not have time during the house job to prepare such an extensive course.

The Council clarified that it did not have the power or authority to exempt anyone from the NLE as it is mandated by the law that any person who graduated after September 2020 would need to





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qualify the NLE to obtain a full license and this had been recently confirmed by the recent judgment handed down by the Lahore High Court.

The Council and the Chairman Academic Board sought to alleviate the other concerns of the students clarifying that the NLE was to test a graduate's ability to apply concepts and knowledge learnt in medical college, to ensure the license was being granted to a safe doctor. The exam is to test the knowledge a graduate is expected to have acquired when they become licensed doctors and are allowed to treat patients. Hence, in reality they would not need to do additional study for it as it would represent questions relating to practical and applied scenarios they would be confronted with as doctors the first day of their practice.

It was noted that part of the concern of the students stemmed from presumptions as to what the exam structure would be as they had not seen the questions or taken the available practice tests. The President informed the students that he will ensure the practice tests after the NLE scheduled on 27th August 2021 will be made public for them to all see the structure and question format which should remove their presumption that the exam was in any way a repeat of their university exams.

The Council, SAPM and Chairman Academic Board all reiterated there was a difference between a university degree and a license





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to practice medicine and it was now an internationally recognized practice to separate the two, not only in the profession of medicine but most other leading professions. It was also categorically stated that a medical graduate wanting to be licensed as a doctor should have no hesitation in taking the exam. The SAPM pointed out that even with his experience he still had to sit exams to revalidate his medical license which ensured that he constantly remained up to date with the most recent changes in medicine and practice. The SAPM and others pointed out that the NLE will test their competency which would also represent a valuable certification of their status as a safe and good doctor. The NLE will hence provide the public with the confidence that a safe and competent doctor is treating them, which was a right of each member of the public.

Another concern raised by some of the students was that if they did not qualify the NLE on the first attempt it would waste at least six months of their time and add a further cost for retaking the exam.

In a meeting of the Council after the discussion with the students, the Council to assist the recent medical graduates decided to take certain measures. The following decisions were taken;





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A) Cost of the NLE for the current graduates as the first class required to take the NLE will be subsidized. The subsidies offered are as follows:

1. Graduates who do not qualify the NLE in the August 2021 session will be permitted to retake their next NLE exam for a subsidized fee of Rs.3,000.
2. Pakistani medical & dental graduates who register to take the NLE scheduled for December 2021 session will be given a 100% discount. In addition, for the first retake, if required, they will only be charged Rs.3,000.
3. Pakistani medical & dental graduates who register for the NLE scheduled for March 2022 will be given a discount of 75% in fee and charged a subsidized fee of Rs.3,000 (25%). In addition, for the first retake, if required, they will only be charged Rs.3,000.
4. Graduates registering for the NLE for the June 2022 session shall be given a 50% discount and charged a fee of Rs.6,000 and the same fee will be charged for the first retake, if required.

B) Pakistani medical & dental graduates can take the exam at any time during their house job or after its completion. Failing to qualify an attempted NLE exam will not affect the validity of their Provisional License which will continue for the period it is issued to allow the completion of their house job.





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C) The NLE will be held four times a year; June, September, December & March to ensure students can attempt a retake within 3 months.

The Council reiterated that the NLE will produce safe doctors through a standardized, merit-based exit examination via a computer-based testing system to ensure transparency, meritocracy, and competency. The Pakistan Medical Commission and the State of Pakistan owe a responsibility to the 220 million citizens of Pakistan to ensure safe and competent doctors are made available for providing quality healthcare.

