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THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR ALLIED AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONS BILL, 2020

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Introduction

Building a strong cadre of Allied and Healthcare Professionals go a long way in strengthening the healthcare delivery system of a country. The formal attempt to examine the contribution of Allied and Healthcare Professionals was undertaken with commissioning of a study and its subsequent report from "Paramedics to Allied Health Services" published in 2012. The report defined AHP's role as *"Individuals who are involved with the delivery of health or healthcare related services, with qualifications and competence in therapeutic, diagnostic, curative, preventive and/or rehabilitative interventions. They could work in interdisciplinary health teams in varied healthcare setting that include doctors, nurses and public health professionals to promote, protect, treat and/or manage a person's physical, mental, social, emotional, environmental health and holistic well-being."*

In this regard, many other professionals belonging to more than fifty allied and health care professions continue to remain unregulated in the health system. These broadly include professional categories such as Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Ophthalmic Sciences, Nutrition Sciences, Medical Laboratory and Life Sciences, Medical Radiology, Imaging and Therapeutic Technology, Medical Technologists and Physician Associates, Trauma, Burn Care and Surgical / Anesthesia related Technology, Community Care and Behavioral Health Sciences and Health Information Management and Health Informatics. There has been a persistent demand for a regulatory framework for such professions for several decades.

Background

The United Nation's Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth with a focus on building resilient health systems stresses upon strengthening the health workers and urges to ensure effective health employment. As estimated by the World Health Organisation, by the year 2030, the global economy is projected to create around forty million new health sector jobs, mostly in the middle and high-income countries. Despite the anticipated growth in jobs, there shall be projected shortage of eighteen million health workers to achieve the sustainable development goals in low and lower middle-income countries.

Need

With the advancement in the health sector, changing preferences of consumers and service providers, it is now warranted to create a fresh vision of healthcare delivery with a patient-centric approach and focus on moving to a multi-disciplinary team-based care. This has necessitated the need to implement new ways of deploying health workers, strengthening the workforce by task-shifting models and improving access to quality services through qualified and competent allied and healthcare professionals.

Accordingly, the Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2018 was introduced in Rajya Sabha on the 31st December 2018 and the same was referred to the Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for its examination and Report. The Committee after detailed examination recommended certain amendments to the said Bill. Therefore, it has been decided to withdraw the pending Bill and to introduce a new Bill, namely, the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2020, incorporating the recommendations made by the Committee.

The Salient Features of the Bill are as follows

- (a) constitution of a National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions for regulation and maintenance of standards of education and services, assessment of institutions, maintenance of a Central Register and State Register of such professionals;
- (b) constitution of Professional Councils for every recognised professional category to frame policies and standards for the governance of allied and healthcare related education and professional services and to regulate their professional conduct;
- (c) constitution of a National Allied and Healthcare Advisory Council to advise Commission on the issues relating to allied and healthcare professionals;
- (d) constitution of State Councils for ensuring the coordinated and integrated development of education and maintenance of standards of delivery of services;
- (e) constitution of the Under-graduate Allied and Healthcare Education Board, Post-graduate Allied and Healthcare Education Board, Allied and Healthcare Professions Assessment and Rating Board and Allied and Healthcare Professions Ethics and

Registration Board for regulating the standards of allied and healthcare professionals;

(f) create and maintain an up-to-date online and live Central Register and State Register of allied and healthcare professionals;

(g) ensuring development of basic standards of education, courses, curricula, facilities, assessment, examination, training, maximum fees etc.;

(h) uniform entry examination with common counselling for admission into allied and healthcare institutions;

(i) uniform exit or licensing examination for professional practice and National Teachers Eligibility Test for academicians;

(j) strategic framework for rational deployment of skilled manpower, performance management systems, task shifting and associated career development pathways;

(k) basic standards framework for machineries, materials and services;

(l) measures to ensure compliance by the State Councils;

(m) constitution of committees by engaging independent experts for technical advice related to any of the professions;

(n) penalty for contravention of provisions of the Bill and the rules and regulations made thereunder;

Impact of the Bill

The 'para-medical professionals' as well as other technologists and therapists have finally been accorded their due recognition and are presently being termed as 'Allied and Healthcare Professionals'. Based on the International Labour Organisation's International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), a detailed mapping has been undertaken to identify such professions.