

Editorial

National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions: A right step to regulate healthcare education and practice in India

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On March 24, 2021, Lok Sabha passed the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill. The bill; seeking to regulate and standardized the healthcare profession in India, was earlier passed by Rajya Sabha on March 16, 2021.^[1] The bill was notified in the official gazette on 28th March 2021.^[2] This bill has fulfilled the long-standing demand of allied and healthcare professions of India to establish a regulatory body for allied and healthcare professions on the lines of existing regulatory bodies for medical (National Medical Commission), dental (Dental Council of India), nursing (Indian Nursing Council), and pharmacy (Pharmacy Council of India) education. The bill and subsequent establishment of the commission are going to benefit approximately one million health care professions in India.^[3]

This bill separately defines an allied health professional and a healthcare professional. An allied health professional has been defined as – “an associate, technician, or technologist trained to support the diagnosis and treatment of any illness, disease, injury, or impairment. Such a professional should have obtained a diploma or degree under this Bill. The duration of the degree/diploma should be at least 2,000 hours (over a period of two to four years).”^[4] On the other hand a healthcare professional is defined as – “a scientist, therapist, or any other professional who studies, advises, researches, supervises, or provides preventive, curative, rehabilitative, therapeutic, or promotional health services. Such a professional should have obtained a degree under this Bill. The duration of the degree should be at least 3,600 hours (over a period of three to six years).”^[4]

The Bill specifies certain categories of allied and healthcare professions as recognized categories. These are mentioned in the Schedule to the Bill and include life science professionals, trauma and burn care professionals, surgical and anesthesia-related technology professionals, physiotherapists, and nutrition science professionals. Fifty-six types of occupations related to allied and healthcare professions, under ten categories have been listed in the bill^[1] as depicted in [Table 1].

As per the provisions of the bill, “National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Profession” shall maintain a ‘Central Allied and Healthcare Professionals’ Register’ which shall contain information including the name of persons and qualifications relating to any of their respective recognized categories. Such a central register shall be deemed to be a public document.^[1] Once this register is in place, no person, other than a registered allied and healthcare professional, shall:

- Hold office as an allied and healthcare professional in Government or in any institution maintained by a local or other authority

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Table 1: Different occupations and categories registered/listed under the national commission for allied and healthcare professions bill.

Recognized category	Subcategory (wherever given)	Allied and healthcare professional
Medical Laboratory and Life Sciences	Life Science Professional	(i) Biotechnologist (ii) Biochemist (nonclinical) (iii) Cell Geneticist, (iv) Microbiologist (nonclinical) (v) Molecular Biologist (nonclinical) (vi) Molecular Geneticist
	Medical Laboratory Sciences Professional	(i) Cytotechnologist (ii) Forensic Science Technologist (iii) Histotechnologist (iv) Hemato Technologist (v) Medical Laboratory Technologist
Trauma, Burn Care and Surgical/ Anesthesia-related technology	Trauma and Burn Care Professional	(i) Advance Care Paramedic (ii) Burn Care Technologist (iii) Emergency Medical Technologist (Paramedic)
	Surgical and Anesthesia-related Technology Professional	(i) Anesthesia Assistants and Technologists (ii) Operation Theater (OT) Technologists (iii) Endoscopy and Laparoscopy Technologists
Physiotherapy Professional	-	Physiotherapist
Nutrition Science Professional	-	(i) Dietician (including Clinical Dietician, Food Service Dietician) (ii) Nutritionist (including Public Health Nutritionist, Sports Nutritionist)
Ophthalmic Sciences Professional	-	(i) Optometrist (ii) Ophthalmic Assistant (iii) Vision Technician
Occupational Therapy Professional	-	Occupational Therapist
Community Care, Behavioural Health Sciences and other Professionals	Community Care	(i) Environment Protection Officer (ii) Ecologist (iii) Community Health promoters (iv) Occupational Health and Safety Officer
	Behavioural Health Sciences Professional	(i) Psychologist (Except Clinical Psychologist covered under RCI for PWD) (ii) Behavioral Analyst (iii) Integrated Behavior Health Counselor (iv) Health Educator and Counselors including Disease Counselors, Diabetes Educators, Lactation Consultants (v) Social workers including Clinical Social Worker, Psychiatric Social Worker, Medical Social Worker (vi) Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Counselors or Family Planning Counselors (vii) Mental Health Support Workers
	Other Care Professionals	(i) Podiatrist (ii) Palliative Care Professionals (iii) Movement Therapist (including Art, Dance, and Movement Therapist or Recreational Therapist)
Medical Radiology, Imaging, and Therapeutic Technology Professional	-	(i) Medical Physicist (ii) Nuclear Medicine Technologist (iii) Radiology and Imaging Technologist Diagnostic Medical Radiographer, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), Computed Tomography (CT), Mammographer, Diagnostic Medical Sonographers] (iv) Radiotherapy Technologist (v) Dosimetrist
Medical Technologists and Physician Associate	Biomedical and Medical Equipment Technology Professional	(i) Biomedical Engineer (ii) Medical Equipment Technologist
	Physician Associate or Physician Assistant	Physician Associates
	Cardio-vascular, Neuroscience and Pulmonary Technology Professional	(i) Cardiovascular Technologists, (ii) Perfusionist, (iii) Respiratory Technologist (iv) Electrocardiogram Technologist or Echocardiogram Technologist (v) Electroencephalogram or Electroneurodiagnostic or Electromyography Technologists or Neuro Laboratory Technologists or Sleep Laboratory Technologists
	Renal Technology Professional	Dialysis Therapy Technologists or Urology Technologists
Health Information Management and Health Informatic Professional	-	(i) Health Information Management Professional (Including Medical Records Analyst) (ii) Health Information Management Technologist (iii) Clinical Coder (iv) Medical Secretary and Medical Transcriptionist

- Provide service in any of the recognized categories in any state
- Be entitled to sign or authenticate any certificate required by any law for the time being in force to be signed or authenticated by a duly qualified allied and healthcare professional.

Besides central commission, every State Government shall, by notification, within 6 months from the date of

commencement of this Act, constitute a State Council to be called the 'State Allied and Healthcare Council' for exercising such powers and discharging such duties as may be laid down under this Act.^[1] Under State Council, four autonomous boards shall function for regulating the allied and healthcare professionals, namely:

- Under-graduate Allied and Healthcare Education Board
- Post-graduate Allied and Healthcare Education Board

- Allied and Healthcare Professions Assessment and Rating Board
- Allied and Healthcare Professions Ethics and Registration Board.

The state council shall also maintain a register of persons for each of the recognized categories to be known as the 'State Allied and Healthcare Professionals' Register'. It has also been notified that from the date of commencement of this Act - no person shall establish an allied and healthcare institution; or an already established allied and healthcare institution shall not open a new or higher course of study or training (including post-graduate course of study or training) which would enable students of each course of study or training to qualify himself for the award of any recognized allied and healthcare qualification; or increase its admission capacity in any course of study or training (including post-graduate course of study or training); or admit a new batch of students in any unrecognized course of study or training (including post-graduate course of study or training), except with the previous permission of the State Council obtained in accordance with the provisions of this Act. Further provided that the allied and healthcare qualification granted to a person in respect of a new or higher course of study or new batch without previous permission of the State Council shall not be a recognized allied and healthcare qualification for the purposes of this Act.^[1] State council shall arrange for the inspections of the institutions and granting recognition.

With this act and subsequent establishment of the commission, the methods of instructions and assessment

in allied health courses will definitely be standardized, allied health professionals will be registered, institutes will be recognized and allied health care profession and professionals will be immensely benefitted.

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