



# Undergraduate Psychiatry Teaching and Learning in India: A Bumpy Ride

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In India, there has been exponential growth in the number of MBBS seats and postgraduate seats over the past two decades. In the year 2021, there were 83,275 MBBS seats and 42,720 postgraduate seats in 554 medical colleges in India.<sup>1,2</sup> As of the second week of October 2023, 706 medical colleges are collectively providing 1,08,890 MBBS seats.<sup>3</sup> In the same period, 331 medical institutions now offer postgraduate programs in psychiatry, contributing to a total of 1,360 MD seats in psychiatry.<sup>4</sup> The change of figures over three years gives an idea about the rapid increment in undergraduate (MBBS) and postgraduate seats in psychiatry in India.

In India, psychiatry is taught as a subject integrated with general medicine. The undergraduate subcommittee of the Indian Psychiatric Society in 1965 mentioned in its report that psychiatry teaching in India was grossly inadequate.<sup>5</sup> Over the next fifty years (i.e., by 2015), insignificant changes happened in undergraduate psychiatry education. This is largely attributed to the scarcity of manpower and infrastructure required for psychiatry teaching and training.<sup>5</sup> Teaching and training of the undergraduate medical students are important for enhancing the mental health care delivery in the community.<sup>6</sup> Strengthening undergraduate teaching is also expected to help bridge the treatment gap for patients with mental illnesses.<sup>7</sup> To strengthen the undergraduate psychiatry training, the Indian Psychiatric Society appealed to the Medical Council of India to make psychiatry an independent subject in MBBS. However, the lack of adequate teachers in all medical colleges is a big hurdle.<sup>8</sup> As psychiatry is not a major subject in the MBBS curriculum, most undergraduate students skip psychiatry classes and focus on other subjects. The stigma associated with mental illness also affects the perception regarding the psychiatry discipline. Many students perceive it in a stigmatizing manner.<sup>9</sup> The way the psychiatry teachers teach psychiatry is also a matter of concern. In the present scenario, undergraduate students in medical colleges are taught psychiatry by faculty members specializing in psychiatry, senior residents, and postgraduate residents. In colleges where there is a limited number of faculty members, senior residents and postgraduate residents primarily teach psychiatry.

In 2019, psychiatry was designated as a major subject in the MBBS curriculum by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Rishikesh (AIIMS-Rishikesh). The change included the introduction of separate examinations at the end of the

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seventh semester. They have also made a consensus on a comprehensive curriculum that will further address the training requirements of Indian Medical Graduates (IMGs).<sup>10</sup> However, the MBBS curriculum for psychiatry is varied across the country.

To ensure uniformity in the curriculum, it has been suggested that the content of undergraduate lectures should contain 80% “Must-know information” and 20% “Desirable information”.<sup>11</sup> It is important to teach skills and demonstrate them through role-play as they significantly impact learning.<sup>11</sup> It is particularly useful when the communication skills are demonstrated to the students. When undergraduate students have clinical posts in psychiatry, small group postings are often useful, which facilitates interactive learning. It also facilitates peer-supervised learning. A small group of 10 to 15 students is often recommended for the clinical posting.<sup>11</sup> In such settings, teachers can give effective feedback to individual students.

Assessment is an important component of teaching psychiatry to the undergraduates. In most medical institutes across the country, structured assessment of the students for psychiatry is not being carried out. Even in institutes that do conduct these assessments, the assessment is confined to the domain of knowledge.<sup>11</sup> However, there is a need to assess the skills and attitudes of the students, which are important parts of learning psychiatry.<sup>11</sup>

To measure the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods as well as the clinical competence of the student, objective structured clinical examinations (OSCE) may be used.<sup>11,12</sup> Researchers used various innovations in teaching to facilitate the learning of psychiatry among undergraduate students.<sup>13</sup>

Recently, to strengthen the undergraduate medical curriculum in India, the National Medical Commission (NMC) suggested mandatory training of the teachers on competency-based medical curriculum (CBMC).<sup>14</sup> Training the teachers about effective and innovative teaching methods is also likely to improve the teaching skills of the teachers and the quality of undergraduate teaching.<sup>9</sup> The developed countries developed resource materials and guidelines for teaching undergraduate psychiatry students.<sup>15</sup> India is lacking in this aspect. Recently, the NMC has developed certain resource materials to help psychiatry teachers augment their undergrad-

uate teaching skills, which must be widely adopted.

Varying levels of expertise and available resources also hinder the effective implementation of the CBMC for undergraduate training. Consequently, the Indian Psychiatric Society has also drafted a competency-based education manual in July 2023. This manual comprises preliminary versions of specific learning objectives, lesson plans, and assessment strategies, and it is also expected to integrate updates from the International Classification of Diseases, 11<sup>th</sup> edition (ICD-11), along with the current NMC guidelines.<sup>16</sup> This could facilitate the adoption of a standardized curriculum throughout the country.

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