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Remove derogatory content on LGBTIQ+ from medical textbooks: NMC directive

SAATHII welcomes the [advisory](#) from the National Medical Commission to medical colleges across India for purging derogatory content around gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and other queer (LGBTIQ+) communities from medical textbook, particularly in forensic medicine and psychiatry. Given the pervasive homophobia and transphobia among medical practitioners and other healthcare providers, such a move, if implemented, will go a long way in making healthcare in India LGBTIQ+ affirmative.

“We would like to point out that the issue of derogatory language is, however, not limited to Forensic Medicine and Psychiatry, but extends to other fields such as Gynecology, Pediatrics, and General Medicine”, said Dr. Sai Subhasree Raghavan, President of SAATHII.

Additionally, the revamped ‘Competency-Based Curriculum’ of the erstwhile Medical Council of India (2018-2019) contains a lot of problematic content including the antiquated medico-legal term ‘sodomy’ that does not distinguish between consensual and non-consensual sex and ought to have been removed after the Navtej Johar (2018) verdict of the Supreme Court that decriminalized consensual sex among adults of the same gender.

“The curriculum also contains terms such as Gender Identity Disorder, which has been phased out by the World Health Organisation with the recognition that gender incongruence is not a pathology. We hope that the National Medical Commission will also address content in these other disciplines, and take a stand against Conversion Therapy”, said Biswa Bhusan Pattanayak, Assistant Director of SAATHII, who leads programs in inclusive healthcare in Odisha and other states.

“Finally, the issue is not only one of misrepresentation but also one of absence. For instance, standard Indian textbooks in Pediatrics do not mention same-gender attraction or transgender identity in a non-pathologizing manner while addressing child and adolescent development”, said Dr. L. Ramakrishnan, Vice President of SAATHII.

We at SAATHII have reviewed textbooks across nine medical subjects, and have been engaging with healthcare providers around the country on the issue of problematic content for the past several years. We are happy to have had a chance to share these concerns with Justice Anand Venkatesh prior to his issuing the Madras High Court orders that resulted in this Advisory.

Dr. Sathish Kumar, Country Director of SAATHII, said “We wish that a standardized curriculum on LGBTIQ+ issues, including key definitions, is included in textbooks for both medical and paramedical courses, at the earliest; and that all health care professionals are trained on providing affirming care for the LGBTIQ+ community. SAATHII and several other civil society organisations have developed content for training of health care providers that could be used for curriculum.”

“I hope the future generations of medical professionals are knowledgeable, wise, compassionate, and ethical in



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their approach to their patients from the LGBTIQ community. The first step is by understanding the wrong steps and next being learning the right one!", said Dr. Sameera Jahagirdar, an ICU specialist with NHS, UK; and former member of the SAATHII healthcare advocacy team.