

MEDICAL PROFESSION GETS ITS SHEEN BACK

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June 19: After a three-year slump, medicine has regained its place as the state's favourite profession — over 23,000 students bought application forms in the hope of bagging one of the 1,653 seats across the government-run medical colleges in Tamil Nadu this year. From a time in 2008 when four toppers declined their MBBS seats at the prestigious Madras Medical College in favour of pursuing engineering and Information Technology courses, the medical profession seems to have regained its sheen as the one career that will not be affected by recession.

"Students have realized that in the IT sector, they are susceptible to pay cuts and even stand the risk of being laid off when there is a slump in the economy. In the medical profession, their job is secure as there is always a shortage of doctors," explains Dr V Kanagasabai, Dean of the Madras Medical College and former Director of Medical Education.

"Medicine is an extremely lucrative option these days, especially if you manage to get a seat in a government medical college, where most of your expenses are taken care of by the state. The only condition is that medical post graduates should sign a contract

agreeing to work for the government for a period of two years, or they should pay a bond of ₹10 lakh if they want to leave within that time," explains Dr Kanagasabai, pointing out that several students manage to slip out of that contract as well. The starting salary for a doctor in government service is around ₹30,000, he adds.

In Tamil Nadu, the MBBS course is four and a half years long, followed by a year-long internship. A post graduate degree can be obtained in three years, and a super specialty course takes another 3 years to complete. Furthermore, it is mandatory for doctors to keep attending Continuing Medical Education classes to keep themselves updated.

"An individual is at least 30 years old by the time he becomes a full-fledged doctor, and an engineer or MBA grad can start work at 22-23 years of age," reasons Kamesh R, student of a private school in Chennai, who has applied for an engineering course this year. However, most of his classmates, including the school toppers have applied to medical and dental colleges.

"It is true that a doctor starts getting his returns a little later than an engineer, but he can catch up with his engineering peers in a matter of two years. Not only do we get a good government salary, but we

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also have flourishing private practices," says Dr G R Ratnavel, assistant professor in dermatology and

cosmetology at Stanley Government Hospital here. Dr Ratnavel is also a consultant at Apollo hospital, and practises at a private clinic in the night.

"Doctors do not have to work under a boss or for a corporate company, but are self-reliant. They can earn in ten years, what an engineer will earn in 50 years. At the end of the day, the medical profession gives you tremendous satisfaction as it is a people-centric job," he concludes.

SHORT OF SEATS

- The directorate of medical Education has sold around 23,000 MBBS application forms this year, as compared to 19,000 last year
- The number of medical seats across 17 govt colleges however remain the same as last year, at 1,653.
- Three of the best government medical colleges in the state - MMC, KMC and Stanley medical college have been denied extra seats by the MCI.

