

MDCAT Reform Committee Holds First Meeting to Address Challenges and Improve Examination Standards

Islamabad 27th November 2024: The Pakistan Medical & Dental Council (PM&DC) recently formed a seven-member committee to make the future Medical & Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT) better and more transparent.

The committee is composed of members from all provinces, tasked with identifying and addressing challenges, ensuring transparency, minimizing errors, and implementing IT-based solutions. This includes considerations for a centralized or university-specific test, a uniform syllabus, and the scheduling of MDCAT immediately after the intermediate exams to combat the influence of tuition mafias.

The inaugural meeting of the MDCAT Reform Committee was held yesterday at the PM&DC office. The President of PM&DC, Prof. Dr. Rizwan Taj, expressed his gratitude to the Chairman and the members of the committee for attending the important meeting and formally requested the Chairman to begin the session.

The Chairman of the committee Prof. Dr. Suhail Amin welcomed all members and provided a brief update on the recent proceedings of MDCAT 2024 and its legal aspects of conducting the examination in accordance with the PM&DC Act 2022. The committee was informed that a total of 167,772 candidates were registered for the 2024 exam across Pakistan, as well as in Dubai and Saudi Arabia. Details regarding the performance of various examining universities, including the total percentage and highest scores, were also shared with the members. Additionally, the committee was updated on the retake of exams for two universities in Sindh and the Federal Government.

Following the brief update, the Chairman emphasized the importance of implementing a unified syllabus for the conduct of this high-stakes examination. He further highlighted the need to incorporate technology to enhance the quality of the exams. Acknowledging that establishing a high-tech examination system with minimal human error and increased transparency is a significant challenge, he pointed out that ensuring a consistent level of difficulty across all provinces is a major hurdle. He added that the committee must exert its best efforts to devise an effective mechanism to address this issue. The Chairman shared his experience interviewing successful candidates admitted to medical institutes, highlighting a significant gap between their scores and overall personality development. He noted that the predictive validity of these scores is weak, emphasizing the urgent need to improve the quality of exams. While he acknowledged that incorporating new domains into the examination might face resistance from stakeholders, he suggested focusing on enhancing cognitive-level assessments as a practical starting point.

The IBCC Chairman announced the completion of the "Examination Bible," a comprehensive guide for grades 9-12 outlining exam procedures and question bank development, to be implemented nationwide. He supported e-examinations for MDCAT, emphasizing their practicality for MCQs, and highlighted the successful adoption of a grading system in board exams. He pledged full support for this national initiative.

The committee also reviewed the status of the syllabus and question bank. PM&DC informed the committee that the MDCAT syllabus has undergone one round of revision, but further revisions are still necessary. The committee also deliberated on enhancing the question bank.

The members discussed that developing an e-assessment system is not a particularly difficult task in the present days. With proper planning and technical support, it can be effectively managed without internet-based assessments. This would be a center-based examination, similar to previous practices, and we could utilize HEC-supported internet portals for enhanced security.

Members of the committee deliberated that globally, all such entry tests are designed to assess a candidate's potential as a health professional. Therefore, we must also consider incorporating more content that tests higher cognitive abilities, critical thinking, and ethical and contextual domains. He further noted that the current practice primarily involves retesting previously covered content, which does not adequately justify the significant efforts invested in this high-stakes examination for a specialized profession.

The President of PM&DC, Prof. Dr. Rizwan Taj, endorsed all the points discussed and informed the members that he had attended several meetings at the Senate and National Assembly on the same issue. He emphasized that PM&DC must submit an Action Plan for the reforms of the MDCAT examination by December 2024.

He added that in response to recent issues regarding the MDCAT examination, it is imperative to address concerns and reaffirm our unwavering commitment to ensure a fair and transparent examination process across Pakistan. He emphasized the need for MDCAT to remain free from controversy and upheld as a standard of integrity. He expressed regret over the misconduct that occurred in the recent MDCAT exam despite extensive efforts to uphold fairness, he stated, "We are deeply concerned about the harm caused by unscrupulous elements who have tarnished the image of the entire system in this national exercise. He expressed hope and confidence that the reform committee will establish a robust and transparent system to restore public trust and preserve the credibility of this critical examination. He showed hope and confidence that the reform committee will devise a robust and transparent system to restore public trust and maintain the credibility of this crucial examination.

we may try our best to prevent such occurrences and take comprehensive steps to ensure long-term sustainability and accountability in the examination system." He further added, "The meeting concluded with the identification of three main categories: Content, Conduct, and Policy. The Chairman formally assigned future tasks and established three sub-committees (working groups) with deadlines for further work to streamline the reform process.

The first sub-committee, the MDCAT Syllabus Committee, is comprised of four members and will draft a unified syllabus with consensus from local and foreign boards. They will develop a Table of Specifications for the exam and create an outline with a plan for building a sustainable question bank.

The second sub-committee, the E-Assessment Project Committee, is comprised of three members who are tasked with proposing a secure question bank portal and e-assessment plan, along with technical specifications and cost estimates. They will also draft a working paper on the modalities for conducting centralized e-MDCAT.

The third sub-committee, the MDCAT Policy Document Committee, is comprised of two members who will work on developing a comprehensive policy document for the smooth implementation of the national exam.

The Chairman directed all sub-committees to submit their drafts by December. The draft action plan shall be reviewed in its upcoming meeting. In his closing remarks, the Chairman thanked all the members formally for their valuable input and time.