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### **Application by 8 Dental Colleges in Sindh to lower MDCAT Passing Marks Rejected by Honourable Sindh High Court**

Eight Dental Colleges in Sindh along with some students who were aspirants for admission to dental programs challenged the admission criteria and specifically the mandatory requirement of having passed the MDCAT exam with a minimum of 60% marks before the Honourable Sindh High Court. The Plaintiffs sought injunctions to restrain the Commission from finalizing the admissions prior to filling all vacant seats in the dental colleges and suspension of the MDCAT result and/or the fixing of 60% passing marks for MDCAT hence enabling dental colleges to admit students who have not qualified the MDCAT or alternatively lowering the standard of merit.

This is also one of the main issues on which the President PAMI recently has been vociferously alleging that the Commission is destroying dental colleges by insisting on maintaining a 60% passing marks in MDCAT and making the MDCAT a mandatory condition for admission. The contention of the dental colleges and President of PAMI has been that BDS program is treated as a second option to MBBS and hence its merit should be lowered.

The Pakistan Medical Commission Act 2020 mandates that the curriculum and standards of medical and dental education be set by the Commission and makes the qualifying of the MDCAT as mandatory for admission to both medical and dental colleges. The Commission has consistently maintained that the standards for medical and dental education need to be improved and enhanced rather than reduced as being demanded by some private colleges and students.





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The Commission has also clarified that it is not the mandate of the Commission to ensure that every allocated seat of a college is filled by the Commission and it is for the college to ensure that it finds a balance in terms of quality of education and facilities offered and the fee charged to attract students to choose a college. Lowering the merit simply to facilitate the financial and business interests of any given private college is neither the mandate of the Commission and nor is it conducive to improvement of medical and dental education.

The Honourable Sindh High Court dismissed the applications of the dentals colleges and students seeking injunction and held that the Commission had prima facie acted within its powers and correctly in setting the MDCAT passing marks at 60% and requiring it as a mandatory condition for admission to dental colleges.

The Honourable Sindh High Court in its Order observed that; *"The cognitive and affective domains required for dental and medical graduates remain the same, as both graduates (MBBS and BDS) are required to interpret data, make diagnoses, develop and execute a treatment plan and perform suitable patient follow-up and deal with common complications. There may be subject specific difference in the psychomotor domain, as the skills that are required by a dental surgeon are different from those required by a medical graduate and in this domain too, there are commonalties i.e. both should be capable of giving the right injections in the prescribed way, both can give incisions etc.; hence the BDS program, though shorter in duration, is not of less intense and deliberation than an MBBS program. The field related training may be different but the dexterity and aptitude required to students of both these medical education are the same;*





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*therefore, lowering the pass percentage for BDS entrants may jeopardize the profession of dentistry. The prime and paramount consideration for the law-makers in this regard may be to produce best health care doctors and dentists in the country and when merit is improved, the students, who desire to get admissions in dentistry, will certainly improve their capacity and the ultimate result would be in the best interest of the country which should not be compromised to achieve commercial interest of the private dental colleges.”*

The decision of the Honourable Sindh High Court and the reasons and observations further reaffirm the consistent position of the Commission that its principle objective is to improve the quality of education and hence the quality of doctors and dentists which will lead to improved health care for the people of Pakistan. There can be absolutely no compromise on this and commercial interests of private colleges, which has led to the recent spate of public attacks on the Commission by the President PAMI, cannot be a factor leading to lowering of merit and quality.

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