

Health secretary's inspection exposes night duty lapses

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Calcutta: Senior doctors, cleaners and Group D staff were missing from emergency wards at some medical colleges despite their names appearing on the duty roster, as a late-night inspection by Bengal's health secretary at four city medical colleges on Saturday exposed gaps in the functioning of state-run hospitals after dark.

Sources told Metro that Narayan Swaroop Nigam, principal secretary of the state health and family welfare department, asked officials of at least one medical college why senior doctors and Group D staff found absent during the visit should not be issued showcase notices.

Assistant professors from at least four departments — medicine, cardiology, orthopae-

dics and surgery — are required to remain present in emergency wards, a senior medical college official said. Junior doctors, including postgraduate trainees and housestaff, are expected to work under their supervision.

Senior doctors from these departments are posted in emergency wards because they handle critical patients requiring immediate intervention, a doctor said.

"Poisoning cases need to be attended to by a doctor from general medicine, patients with chest pain or heart attacks require a cardiologist, while trauma injuries caused by road accidents or other incidents often need the intervention of a surgeon or an orthopaedic specialist," said a retired professor of SSKM Hospital.

The retired professor said the absence of senior doctors from emergency duty was not

a new problem and expressed hope that the new government would finally address it.

"All previous attempts to ensure the presence of senior doctors at night have failed. They are usually called to the emergency only when a critical patient arrives, whereas they should already be stationed there. The entire burden of patient management is left to postgraduate trainees," the retired professor said.

"The health secretary did not find senior doctors at the emergency department in at least one medical college. A few showcase notices have to be issued," said an official.

"He was angry and upset about the absence of doctors as well as Group D staff," said an official.

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Health secretary Narayan Swaroop Nigam (in blue shirt) speaks with officials of RG Kar hospital on Saturday night

Night duty lapses

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The health secretary's "surprise visit" came days after a meeting between chief minister Suvendu Adhikari and heads of several medical colleges at SSKM Hospital on Wednesday in the presence of senior health department officials.

Suvendu had asked the medical college heads to see that patients were not turned away from state-run hospitals or forced to move from one healthcare facility to another in search of a bed.

The meeting at SSKM Hospital was Suvendu Adhikari's first interaction with health department officials. The BJP's

two doctor-MLAs — Sharadwat Mukherjee from Salt Lake and Indranil Khan from Behala West — were present.

On Saturday, the state's health secretary visited Calcutta National Medical College and Hospital, NRS Medical College and Hospital, Medical College Kolkata and RG Kar Medical College and Hospital.

"The visits began around 9.30pm on Saturday and continued till 1am on Sunday. The health secretary also provided two ambulances to each hospital. The hospitals were instructed to ensure that any patient referred to another facility is transported in these ambulances. Patients should not have to spend money on hiring ambulances after being referred from a state-run hospital," an official said.