

Med experts seek tough laws against cut practice

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Mumbai: Some of the country's leading medical experts have unified in their fight against cut-practice by demanding stringent legislation against doctors who indulge in the unethical practice. The state's eight-member panel, formed to find a solution to the malice, also held its first meeting on Tuesday.

Bandra's Asian Heart Institute chairman and cardiac surgeon Dr Ramakant Panda, whose hospital kicked up a storm in the fraternity

by putting up a hoarding saying 'No commission. Only honest medical opinion', said on Wednesday that the state panel was looking at anti-kickback legislations in US and UK. At the first meeting of the state panel, talks of standardising treatment protocols and linking them with insurance plans were also discussed. The hospital has also put up 10 posters across the city in response to IMA's threat to withdraw the first one.

"The cost of medical treatment will reduce by 25% if cut-practice is stopped. At least 50% of

the money spent by patients on treatment indirectly goes to agents, who pay doctors on behalf of hospitals," said Panda. He said at least in a third of cases where patients are advised angioplasty or bypass, it's not indicated.

The senior cardiac surgeon also said he was surprised how the Indian Medical Association (IMA) reacted to their anti-corruption initiative. "We did expect some reaction but not such an extreme one. Unfortunately, IMA protects such people. It's not that they don't have honest members in the orga-

nisation, but they do need to introspect," he said.

Experts have called for a multi-pronged approach to tackle it. Former Medical Council of India member Dr Gautam Sen said one has to look into the root of the evil. "Look at the cost of private medical education in this country. If a student spends Rs4-5 crore for a degree and doesn't get patients in his practice, he will have little choice but to succumb to the nexus," he said. Bodies like IMA and MCI should have legislations with patients' interest at heart, he added.

Calling cut-practice a fundamental flaw in the medical profession, Dr Gullapalli Nageswara Rao, founder of Hyderabad's LV Prasad Eye Institute, said eminent members of the fraternity must convince hospital managements not to indulge in cut practice. Dr Samiran Nundy, however, said cut practice was not confined to India. "It exists everywhere, and could be worse in other countries. But these countries have strict monitoring bodies that dole out tough punishment for wrongdoing; and that is missing in India," he said.