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IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

Dated: 18.01.2024

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THE HONOURABLE **DR. JUSTICE ANITA SUMANTH**

W.P.Nos.632, 634, 641, 620, 626, 631 & 629 of 2024

W.P.No.632 of 2024

Dr.S.Christina Thilagavathani

... Petitioner

VS

1.The State of Tamil Nadu

Represented by its Principal Secretary,
Health and Family Welfare Department,
Secretariat, Chennai - 600 009.

2.Directorate of Medical Education,

Represented by the Director of Medical Education,
Kilpauk, Chennai - 600 010.

3.Directorate of Medical and Rural Health Services,
Represented by the Director of Medical Health and
Rural Health Services,
359, Anna Salaia, Chennai - 600 006.

4.Directorate of Public Health and Preventive Medicine,
Represented by its Director of Public Health and Preventive Medicine,
359, Anna Salai, Chennai - 600 006.

5.The Dean,
Tirunelveli Medical College and Hospital,
Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli - 627007
(& etc. batch)

.... Respondents



PRAYER in W.P.No.632 of 2024: Writ Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India praying to issue a Writ of Mandamus directing the Respondents to treat the Petitioner's two-year compulsory bond period as completed, and to consequently relieve the petitioner from bonded service in the Ramanathapuram Government Medical College and Hospital and to direct the 5th respondent to return the all original certificates and documents collected by the 5th respondent while admitting the petitioner to the post graduate degree course along with Post Graduate degree certificate.

W.P.No.	For Petitioner	For Respondents
632, 634 & 641 of 2024	Ms.K.Subharitha (appeared in VC)	Mr.Stalin Abhimanyu Additional Government Pleader
620, 626 & 629 of 2024	Mr.V.Kadhirvelu	Mr.Stalin Abhimanyu Additional Government Pleader

COMMON ORDER

These matters were disposed on 10.01.2024. However, while finalizing the order it was found that the certificates for quantification of covid duty has not been placed on record by the petitioners. Hence, the matters were re-posted today when the certificates have been produced.

2. Mr.Stalin Abhimanyu, learned Additional Government Pleader accepts notice for the respondents and is armed with instructions to enable final disposal of the matter, even at this juncture. Hence, by consent of both learned counsel, these Writ Petitions are taken up for final disposal, even at the stage of admission.



3. I have considered an identical prayer as in the present Writ Petitions in

W.P.No.28238 of 2023 and have held as follows:

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"The petitioner is a Doctor, who had completed Post Graduation in General Medicine from KAP Viswanathan Medical College in the non service category. He had completed the course in May, 2022 and had, at the time of admission to the course, executed a bond for a sum of Rs.40 lakhs undertaking that he would serve the State for a period of two years after completion of the course. The bond period, admittedly, runs till 31.05.2024.

2. Within a few months of commencing the course, the Covid 19 pandemic had struck and the petitioner, and, in fact several other identically / similarly placed candidates, were required to be on covid duty in R5 Hospital. Though no appointment orders could be issued seeing as the petitioner was a student then, his services during the covid period is not disputed as duty sheets for the service rendered have duly been produced by the petitioner and verified by the respondent counsel.

3. The question as to whether covid duty would constitute in-bond service is no longer res integra having been considered and accepted by two learned Judges in W.P.No.26556 of 2022 (decision dated 02.02.2023) and W.P.No.22894 of 2023 (decision dated 08.09.2023). In these cases, the petitioners were students who were required to perform covid duty during their course and this Court has held, and I concur with these decisions, that the covid duty rendered by the students should be taken note of as service during the bond period.

4. An additional question that arises in this case is as to whether quarantine relatable to covid period is also be taken as bond service. The period of quarantine is, in my



considered view, nothing but an extension of covid duty itself as the Rules prevalent then required mandatory quarantine. The petitioner would well have continued with the duty in the covid ward itself has it not been for the mandate of compulsory quarantine. Thus, taking the period of quarantine also as on-duty, such period in this case is quantified as 150 days. On-duty call sheets duly signed by the Dean of R5 college have been produced by the petitioner. This will advance the closure of bond period to 02.01.2024 from 31.05.2024.

5. The petitioner's request for a mandamus directing the respondents to treat compulsory bond period as concluding on 02.01.2024 is accepted. R5 is directed, upon completion of bond period on 02.01.2024, to return to the petitioner, his original certificates received at the time of admission to PG course. 6. Allowed in the above terms. No costs. Connected miscellaneous petition is closed."

4. Yet another development has been noted by me in W.P.Nos.32073, 33124, 32505, 32512, 29724 and 32380 of 2023 to following effect:

"The issue of treating Covid duty as period of duty for the purpose of computing of bond service now stands settled categorically by virtue of an order passed by the First Bench in W.P.Nos.25827, 25785 and 27568 of 2023, decided on 16.11.2023.

2. Those Writ Petitions relate to the recruitment of Assistant Surgeons. In the course of the discussion, the First Bench has settled the position that, both for the purpose of Under Graduate (UG) as well as Post Graduate (PG) medical education, the duties performed during covid period/treating covid patients should be treated as eligible duty.



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3. The discussion from paragraph 7 onwards is clear to this effect and reads as follows:

7. It is true that the services rendered by the Post-Graduate students is part of their 36 months period training which they undergo. The said period is supposed to be the practical training towards the subject in which they undergo the study. Because of the abnormal situation arising out of the COVID - 19 pandemic, they were also roped in COVID - 19 duty in the COVID - 19 wards in the Government Hospitals. It is not in dispute that they put in the same kind of duty and underwent the same rigors as that of the other medical officers recruited by the State Government. As a matter of fact, the persons, who were recruited by the State Government for the said purpose of performing COVID - 19 duty in these wards which are set up as part of the disaster management, are categorised as 'Medical Officers'.

7.1. It may be seen that both these temporary appointees as well as the Post-Graduate medical students are registered medical practitioners eligible to be appointed as Assistant Surgeons. Service to the Health Department, Government of Tamil nadu is governed by the Statutory Rules known as Tamil Nadu Medical Service Rules. It contains two parts namely, Branch-I Medical and Branch-II Nursing. As far as the medical cadre is concerned, as per Rule 2, it is divided into Civil Surgeon cadre and Assistant Surgeon cadre. All the entry level posts of Assistant Surgeon in the general line, Non-Clinical Lectures, Tutors / Assistant Professors, Clinical Lecturers, Senior Residents / Assistant Professors and the Women State Family Planning Officer are all grouped under the cadre of Assistant Surgeon. Thus,



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it can be seen that there is no such post as such called 'Medical Officer'. But, the term 'Medical Officer' is widely used in the rules to denote every registered medical practitioner appointed to any post. When it comes to deputing personnel for the Chennai City Police, they are called Medical Officers to the Chennai City Police. The Senior Residents are also termed as 'Resident Medical Officers' Similarly, the term 'Medical Officer' is generally used in the context of referring to the person who is working in any capacity with the qualified medical degree (in common parlance, the Doctors working in the department).

4. Thus, the submission of the respondents to the effect that PG students were only been given 'training' and that such service must be disregarded for computation of duty/bond period cannot be accepted. In light of the decision of the First Bench cited supra affirming the principle that the duty performed by PG students during Covid period must be taken as regular medical service.

5. The State has now issued G.O.Ms.No.371 dated 18.11.2023 directing that the term 'Medical Officers' mentioned at Para 5.1(i) of G.O.(MS.) No.278, Health and Family Welfare (B1) Department dated 17.08.2023 be replaced as 'Medical Officers including Post Graduate Students'. The authorities have been directed to issue certificates confirming the number of days when covid duty was performed by the students.

6. In light of the above, let such certificates be issued to the petitioners at least two days prior to the next date of hearing. List on 05.12.2023. Written instructions/counter, if any, by then with an advance copy to the petitioners."



5. The petitioners have received and have placed on record covid duty certificates in terms of G.O.Ms.No.371 dated 18.11.2023 and G.O.(MS.) No.278 dated 17.08.2023. The details of the post-graduation courses completed by the petitioners and the number of days of covid duty rendered by the petitioners as per the certificates issued by the respondents, are as follows:

W.P. No	PETITIONERS' NAME	PG in : (01.05.2019 to 30.04.2022)	PG COURSE	COVID-19 DUTY PERIOD	DATE OF POSTING ORDER	PRESENT WORK PLACE	NO.OF WORKING DAYS
632 of 2024	Dr.S.Christina Thilagavathani	Tirunelveli Medical College and Hospital	M.S. Obstetrics and Gynecology	24.03.2020 to 30.04.2022	13.07.2022 Joined on: 25.07.2022	Ramathapuram Govt Medical College and Hospital	449
634 of 2024	Dr.S.Abinaya	Tirunelveli Government Medical College and Hospital	MD., Radio Diagnosis	From April 2020 to April 2022	06.12.2022 Joined on : 26.12.2022	Nagapattinam Government Medical College	339
641 of 2024	Dr.K.Ashwini Devi	Government Villupuram Medical College	M.S. Obstetrics and Gynecology	From 24.03.2020 to 30.04.2022	07.07.2022 Joined on : 27.10.2022	Pudukottai Govt Medical College and Hospital	504
620 of 2024	Dr.Belinda Frank	Tirunelveli Government Medical College and Hospital	M.S. Obstetrics and Gynecology	From 24.03.2020 to 30.04.2022	07.07.2022 Joined on: 25.07.2022	Govt Medical College and Hospital, Thiruvannamalai	376
626 of 2024	Dr.Janani.S	Tirunelveli Government Medical College & Hospital	M.D. Radiology	April 2020 to April 2022	15.12.2022 Joined on: 19.12.2022	Thiruvallur Government Medical College & Hospital	140
629 of 2024	Dr.S.Mohainudheen Sharuk	Government Theni Medical College	M.D.General Medicine	24.03.2020 to 30.04.2022	10.09.2022 Joined on : 27.10.2022	Government Hospital, Kadayannallur	441
631 of 2024	Dr.R.Nishanthi	Tirunelveli Medical College and Hospital	M.S. Obstetrics and Gynecology	24.03.2020 to 30.04.2022	13.07.2022 Joined on : 18.07.2022	Government Medical College, Pudukottai	514



6. Mrs.Geetha Thamaraiselvan, learned Special Government Pleader for the respondents would categorically confirm that the particulars as set out in the tabulation above have been verified with the authorities to be correct and representing the proper sequence of events.

7. The petitioners had completed their courses in April, 2022 and as per the decision of the First Bench of this Court in *State of Tamil Nadu vs P.S.Sairam and others* (2020) 7 Madas LJ 513, the posting orders are to run co-terminus with the period of successful completion of course of the candidate.

8. That apart, the Health and Family Welfare (MCA-1) Department vide G.O.Ms.No.17 dated 11.01.2024 has issued an order to the effect that the bond period for Non Service Post Graduates (Degree/Diploma) who have completed their Post Graduate courses in the year 2022 will be reduced from two years to one year. The benefit of this reduction is thus available to the present petitioners.

9. In W.P.Nos.634 and 626 of 2024, the duration mentioned in the posting order is one year and six months bearing in mind the fact that orders have been issued belatedly as against which the petitioners have rendered regular duty of a period of 339 days and 140 days respectively. The petitioner in W.P.No.626 of 2024 has joined duty on 19.12.2022 and from 22.05.2023 to till date, she is on Maternity leave. In W.P.Nos.620, 629, 631, 632 and 641 of 2024 the duration mentioned in the posting order is two years, as against which the petitioners have



rendered regular duty of 376 days, 441 days, 514 days, 449 days and 504 days respectively. The petitioner in W.P.No.620 of 2024 has joined regular duty on 25.07.2022 and from 04.08.2023 to till date she is on High risk pregnancy leave.

10. However, the petitioners have rendered covid duty for a period more than two years and this, combined with the regular duty is far in excess of the requirement of one duty of one year as per the latest Government Order dated 11.01.2024. Hence, seen from any quarter, the petitioners are entitled to the return of the certificates as sought for.

11. The petitioners are all hence released from bonded Government service and there is a direction to the Deans of the respective colleges, all arrayed as respondents, to return their original certificates when the petitioners presents themselves before them, forthwith.

12. These Writ Petitions are disposed in the aforesaid terms. No costs. Connected Miscellaneous Petitions are closed.

18.01.2024

Index : Yes/No
Speaking Order:Yes
Neutral Citation:Yes
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DR.ANITA SUMANTH, J.

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Represented by its Principal Secretary,
Health and Family Welfare Department,
Secretariat, Chennai - 600 009.

2.Directorate of Medical Education,

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