



Tokyo Medical University discriminated against female applicants by lowering entrance exam scores: sources

Tokyo Medical University deducted points from the entrance exam scores of all female applicants to keep the ratio of women studying at the university at about 30 percent, sources familiar with the matter said Thursday.

The practice likely began around 2010 and was apparently aimed at avoiding a shortage of doctors at affiliated hospitals. The medical college believed female doctors often resign or take long leave after getting married or giving birth, leading to a shortfall, according to the sources.

The university deducted 10 to 20 percent of the points scored by female applicants, the sources said.

A university spokesperson said Thursday that the school will conduct an investigation into the matter.

The revelation comes in the wake of a bribery scandal involving the university's top executives and a senior education ministry official.

In July, Masahiko Usui, 77, and Mamoru Suzuki, 69, resigned as the chairman and president of the university, respectively, following allegations that they bribed a bureaucrat, Futoshi Sano, 59, by guaranteeing his son's enrollment in exchange for a government subsidy. They have since been indicted.

The entrance exam bias came to light during an internal probe by the university's lawyers following the bribery scandal.

An education ministry official in charge of entrance exams said the government has asked higher-education institutions to detail how they select students in their guidance to applicants.

"If the university did not disclose the process and has been discriminating against applicants based on gender, that would be a problem," the official said.

Tokyo Medical University's entrance process consists of two stages. The first sees applicants take a multiple-choice exam and those who progress undergo further assessment by writing an essay and attending interviews.

The university deducted the female applicants' points after the first stage to reduce the number who would advance to the next phase.

The practice wasn't explained to the applicants, the sources said.

Of the 1,596 men and 1,018 women who applied to the university in the 2018 academic year starting in April, 19 percent of the male applicants, or 303, passed the first stage, compared to 14.5 percent of female applicants, or 148.

A total of 141 men and 30 women passed the second stage, bringing the overall pass rates by gender to 8.8 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively.

A group of female doctors who had previously raised their concerns over the possible existence of the discriminatory practice said they are glad the issue has finally come to light.

Kyoko Tanebe, an executive board member at the Japan Joint Association of Medical Professional Women, said other medical universities are believed to have engaged in similar practices.

“This is a grave issue,” said Tanebe, an obstetrician in Toyama Prefecture. She spoke about the suspected practice a number of times at government committee meetings and gatherings of medical practitioners, but many didn’t show much interest, she said.

Ruriko Tsushima, another executive board member with the association, slammed the practice as an act of unforgivable discrimination toward women.

“I can’t forgive (what the institution is said to have) done to people who studied hard to get into the university, hoping to become doctors,” said the head of a women’s clinic in Tokyo. “It shouldn’t happen in a democratic country that is supposed to provide equal educational opportunities.”

Although equality in medicine has improved with time, some institutions still don’t let female doctors enter operating rooms, she said.

“Generally speaking, unjustly discriminating against female applicants in an entrance exam cannot be accepted at all,” said education minister Yoshimasa Hayashi.

The education ministry asked the university on July 25 to report on its applicant selection process and whether it has adhered to it.

In the wake of the latest revelation, the ministry intends to ask the university to explain its treatment of female applicants when it issues its report.

“We will wait for a report from the university and consider how to respond,” Hayashi said.



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