

3 November 2009

HRW Reports on India's access to pain treatment

On 28 October 2009, Human Rights Watch released a report describing India's health care system and the hundreds of thousands of patients in that country who unnecessarily experience excruciating pain due to restrictive drug regulations, lack of training for health care workers, and poorly integrated care. The 102-page report, "[Unbearable Pain: India's Obligation to Ensure Palliative Care](#)," focuses specifically on the availability of pain treatment for cancer patients, saying that fewer than 4 percent of patients with advanced cancer have access to appropriate pain treatment. The report also says that increased government funding for cancer has not emphasized palliative care. Governments have an obligation to ensure that essential medicines, including morphine, are available to patients and the report indicates that the failure of the Indian government to fulfill this obligation violates the right to health.

The full report and accompanying video, *Right to Relief: Palliative Care in India*, can be accessed from the [PPSG home page](#) or at <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/10/28/unbearable-pain-0>.

The following is an excerpt from the October 10, 2009 edition of *Pallium India*.

Andhra Pradesh amends and simplifies its narcotic regulations:

One step forward in access to opioids in India. Andhra Pradesh becomes the 14th state of India to amend and simplify its narcotic regulations. This is the consequence of about 10 years of effort. Congratulations, the palliative care team at MNJ Cancer Institute!

The government of India, in 1998, had instructed all states to amend their narcotic regulations, but most did not. The Indian Association of Palliative Care (IAPC) and the Pain and Policy Studies Group (PPSG) at Madison-Wisconsin worked together to effect the change in Andhra Pradesh, but despite two workshops with government officials and professionals, the results had been disappointing. Following the establishment of a palliative care training center at MNJ Institute of Oncology (MNJIO) as a joint initiative of MNJIO, Pallium India, the International Network for Cancer Treatment and Research (INCTR) and the American Cancer Society, the MNJIO team renewed efforts to bring about change. And we believe the public interest litigation filed by IAPC in the Supreme Court of India helped. Now that the rules have been amended, palliative care centers in Andhra Pradesh can get the required morphine without a complicated licensing process.

For more on the challenges and efforts in India to improve availability of opioids for relief of severe pain in India, please see <http://www.painpolicy.wisc.edu/internet/SEARO/India/index.htm>.