

# Pain & Policy Studies Group • International Pain Policy Fellowship



BANGLADESH

**Rumana Dowla, MBBS, MPH, DipPalMed**  
Fellow 2012-2014

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For further information on Bangladesh:  
<http://www.painpolicy.wisc.edu/country/profile/bangladesh>

## BACKGROUND:

At the beginning of the fellowship, Bangladesh had no palliative care policy or clinical guidelines for the management of pain. Although immediate-release oral morphine was on the national Essential Drugs List, it was not available in the country. The 1990 Narcotics Control Act and other drug regulations presented significant barriers to the treatment of pain with opioid analgesics, and doctors were untrained in using them.

Two Fellows were selected from Bangladesh: (1) Dr. Rumana Dowla, a Palliative Medicine Specialist physician with a background in Public Health and Pediatrics, who was the founder and Chairperson of the Bangladesh Palliative & Supportive Care Foundation, and (2) Dr. Farzana Khan, a physician who was pursuing her PhD in Palliative Care, and who is part of the Centre for Palliative Care at, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), the only medical university in the country. For the IPPF Training session held in Wisconsin, USA, the Fellows were accompanied by the Advisor to the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, demonstrating high-level government support for improving the availability and access to opioids for palliative care.

## FELLOWSHIP SUCCESSES:

In an effort to change the legal environment in which opioids are distributed in Bangladesh, in late 2012, Drs. Khan and Dowla worked with the DNC to organize a nationwide training program on palliative care for the narcotics officials. A total of 60 regional agents, police, and inspectors attended the workshops. The goal was to enlist their help in promoting licit access, while preventing diversion. Experienced advocates know that in a country where drug control enforcement has trumped pain control enhancement, changing the law is not enough. Real reform can happen only if the police understand that access to opioids, while seeking to prevent their abuse and diversion is possible.

In February 2013, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between BSMMU and a regional palliative care NGO, the Asia Pacific Hospice Network (APHN), and the Lien Collaborative to establish a "Train the Trainer" program for the next three years to develop national palliative care trainers throughout the country. Dr. Dowla was a signatory and witness to the MoU and was selected as APHN management committee member and coordinator and was assigned to draft the first program content which includes opioid availability and accessibility. Both Drs. Khan and Dowla were designated as local faculty and mentors for the program.

Dr. Dowla was instrumental in facilitating collaboration between national palliative care experts, Bangladeshi pharmaceutical companies, the DNC, and experts from BSMMU, which resulted in the initiation of the production of 10 mg IR morphine tablets at local pharmaceutical companies in February 2014. This local production of an additional formulation of morphine should ensure the availability of all essential morphine formulations on a more continuous, uninterrupted basis for patients in Bangladesh than was possible in the past.

As new opioid analgesic formulations are made available in Bangladesh, the important process of educating and training physicians and nurses about how to safely prescribe and dispense opioids to treat pain has begun with a

number of initiatives. Dr. Dowla played a key role in initiating three courses in palliative care for nurses, physicians and postgraduate physician residents. A short course for physicians held in March 2013 at a School of Public Health focused on pain management and community based palliative care. As a result of popular demand, there are plans to start a Diploma on Palliative Medicine –with a community based approach.

Under the leadership of the newly formed National Palliative Care Society of Bangladesh—both Fellows have been elected to be officers—Palliative Care Guidelines are taking shape based on models from India and Vietnam.

### ONGOING PROGRESS:

In 2014, during the 67th session of WHO Regional Committee on South East Asia, held in Dhaka Bangladesh, key language recognizing the importance of revising national legislation governing controlled medicines was included in Bangladesh's newly adopted National Policy for Non-Communicable Diseases.

### CHALLENGES AND FUTURE NEEDS:

While “train the trainer” programs and workshops have been set up to educate medical professionals about the importance of and practices for using opioids to treat pain, there is still a large deficit in education. A survey in 2013 of physicians showed that a majority of responders demonstrated poor knowledge and attitudes towards opioid availability, accessibility and use.

### PUBLICATIONS:

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