

# Pain & Policy Studies Group • International Pain Policy Fellowship



INDIA

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**Fellow 2012-2014**

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For further information on India:

<http://www.painpolicy.wisc.edu/country/profile/india>

## BACKGROUND:

Improving palliative care in India has been a goal for over the last two decades. One of the largest barriers blocking patient access to opioids has been the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, which created many obstacles for those trying to procure opioid medicines. Doctors were not trained well in administering or prescribing the medicines, and pharmacies did not stock them. As a result, access to opioids was limited to the point where in 1998 Dr. Ravi Ghooi (along with colleagues) brought a public interest litigation to the Delhi High Court requesting that it direct concerned government agencies to improve their rules and make morphine available after his mother was unable to access morphine to treat her cancer related pain. In 1998 modified rules, which were promulgated by the Government of India for the states, were created to streamline the procurement process for opioids. Some states adopted the rules over time, however actual implementation was low.

In 2012, three accomplished Indian palliative care experts from different parts of the country, with differing skills and strengths, were selected as International Pain Policy Fellows: (1) a Palliative Care physician working at a nationally-renowned palliative care training center outside of Mumbai, (2) a PhD cancer control policy expert, based in Mumbai, who is also a Trustee for Pallium India, a palliative care NGO, which is the home of the WHO Collaborating Centre (WHOCC) for Training and Policy on Access to Pain Relief, and (3) a Palliative Care physician based in Bangalore, who is also part of the Pallium India/WHOCC. The Fellows were accompanied to the training session in Madison by two senior high-level officials from the Government of India (GOI): (1) the Director of Narcotics Control, Department of Revenue in the Ministry of Finance, and (2) a Deputy Director General in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).

## FELLOWSHIP SUCCESSES:

Most notably, the fellows from India all contributed to advocacy efforts to assist in the drafting, and ultimate passage, of the NDPS Amendment by the Indian Parliament in 2014. The result was a more balanced law – one with national consistency for licensing and movement of opioids between Indian States, while maintaining adequate controls against diversion.

Dr. Vallabhan participated in the MoHFW workgroup to develop an overall strategic plan to expand access to palliative care and pain relief. This plan was submitted to the Supreme Court as an objective dedicated to strengthening the NDPS Act. She also worked with the WHO India country office, Pallium India/ the WHO Collaborating Centre for Training and Policy on Access to Pain Relief based in Trivandrum and the MoHFW to create the implementation framework for the national palliative care strategy. A central part of this process involved Dr. Vallabhan's coordination of a workshop to develop the implementation framework involving leaders representing government, non-profit/non-governmental organizations, health educational and professional associations and advisory boards, and private health institutions.

## ONGOING PROGRESS:

The Rules for the NDPS Act Amendments 2014 were drafted in mid-2015 and are currently under review. The rules contain recommendations for the smooth transitions of regulations at state level to support accessibility and availability of opioid analgesics and for preventing misuse and diversion. Several workshops have also been held across the country in order to educate healthcare professionals and policy leaders about the importance of opioid medications for pain relief.

## CHALLENGES AND FUTURE NEEDS:

India is a very large country that needs to educate and inform its health care providers and its patients regarding opioid medications. This will take a considerable amount of time. There has also been a change in the government since the fellowship ended, which means that the relationships already built now need to be rebuilt and advocacy needs to continue with new players in the policy realm. While the rules have been published there is now a push as to how to help implementation occur.

## PUBLICATIONS:

- Lawyers Collective, Parliament passes the NDPS (Amendment) Bill, 2014: many gains, some losses. 2014. <http://www.lawyerscollective.org/updates/parliament-passes-ndps-amendment-bill-2014-gains-losses.html>
- Mohapatra, Satyakam et al. Appraisal of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Amendment) Act, 2014. Asian Journal of Psychiatry , Volume 14 , 80 – 81. [http://www.asianjournalofpsychiatry.com/article/S1876-2018\(15\)00041-6/abstract](http://www.asianjournalofpsychiatry.com/article/S1876-2018(15)00041-6/abstract)



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