

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 1997 Dr. Ravi Ghooi (along with colleagues) petitioned the Delhi High Court requesting help for accessing morphine for his mother who was suffering due to her cancer related pain.

The 1998 modified rules, which were promulgated by the Government of India for the states, were created to streamline the procurement process for opioids in healthcare institutions. Some states adopted the rules over time, however actual implementation was limited.

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 was an active participant of the civil society alliance involved with amending the NDPS Act. 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:

Dr. Vallath working with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) coordinated the expert group to develop an overall strategic plan for national access to palliative care and pain relief. The draft was submitted by the MoHFW as the National Program for Palliative Care to the Supreme Court with the amendment of NDPS Act as one of the main objectives. Dr. Vallath was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the other accomplishment she contributed towards: the 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.

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. Two workshops have been held across the country in order to educate administrators and policy leaders about the importance of the drug policy reform in improving the medical use of opioids.

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 fresh relationships are to be built 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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