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PTI

Web of influence Tainted ex-MCI chief Ketan Desai
CONTROVERSY: KETAN DESAI

The Practice Of Unethics

A tainted man in India...a world body's president!

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COMMENTS

TEXT SIZE A|A|A

The World Medical Association (WMA), an independent, international body of physicians from 102 countries, aims to achieve "high standards of medical ethics". However, Ketan Desai, its new president, might not inspire confidence in that pursuit. The former president of the Medical Council of India (MCI) had been removed from that post for corruption and spent six months in a Delhi jail. He is now on bail and awaiting trial in a criminal court.

Such is his influence over medical bodies in India that he has managed to convince the WMA of his credibility through the full backing of top office-bearers of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) and the current MCI board. These are office-bearers who had taken charge after Desai's his arrest on April 22, 2010.

In response to a PIL filed by People for Better Treatment (PBT), a voluntary group, against "manipulation and rigging" in the election of MCI office-bearers (who are said to be close to Desai), the Supreme Court has issued notices to the Union health ministry and the MCI. It has sought a CBI inquiry.

In what seems to have spiraled into a war between the PBT and Ketan Desai, PBT president Kunal Saha has been persistently fighting against corruption in the MCI, against Desai in particular. Saha had fought for 15 years before recently succeeding to gain Rs 5.6 crore compensation for the death of his wife, Anuradha Saha, due to gross medical negligence by a Calcutta hospital. From filing rtis and petitioning the minister to address the issue, the PBT has now written to WMA president Dr Xavier Deau, seeking his intervention to expel Desai from the post of WMA president-elect for 2016. Desai, believed to have connections across political parties, has ensured that a letter by an MCI ethics committee member, Dr Ajay Kumar, falsely claiming that all cases against him have been closed, be sent to the international association. This despite the CBI stating that two cases against him are still pending and that he has been chargesheeted in one of them.



“Desai’s election might not be illegal yet, but it is immoral and unethical. How can a man of such disrepute head the WMA?”Chinnu Srinivasan, Healthcare Activist

Taking note of this, then MCI chief vigilance officer H.K Jethi had recommended that the health ministry take action against ethics committee members Dr Ajay Kumar, Dr Vinay Aggarwal and Dr Sudipto Roy, who have ‘illegally’ supported Dr Desai. Unfortunately, the health ministry has not taken any action against the three doctors. They still remain part of the ethics committee.

In another letter to the health ministry, Jethi had also complained of being a “victim of statutory and physical harassment in retaliation to my drive against corruption by the vigilance section” by the MCI administration, especially president Dr Jayshreeben Mehta, also an aide of Desai. Again, no action has been taken against the administration, and Jethi

has simply been transferred from the MCI, as per his request.

The IMA on its part has said that the CBI has closed the disproportionate assets case against Desai. The court has stayed the hearing on the case, which involves four other persons besides Desai, for accepting a bribe of Rs 2 crore to certify a medical college in Punjab. That apart, no chargesheet has been filed against Desai in another case of corruption in a Lucknow court. “As far as we are concerned, he is innocent until he is proven guilty and therefore we fully back his nomination to the WMA,” said Dr K.K. Aggarwal, secretary-general of the IMA.

While Desai’s license to practice medicine had been suspended by the MCI on his arrest, the Gujarat Medical Council has challenged the MCI and claimed that state councils alone have the authority to issue or suspend license of doctors practicing in that state. It has also been revealed during the 2G scam investigations that CBI director Ranjit Sinha had met Desai, besides other several high-profile accused in cases being investigated by the CBI. “The election of Desai might not be ‘illegal’ yet. However, it is immoral and unethical. How can a man of such disrepute, through the sheer weight of his connections, represent the country in an international forum?” asks healthcare activist Chinnu Srinivasan. MCI ethics committee members refused to comment on the matter.