Editorials

World Medical Association’s tainted president, Ketan Desai

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Article

All rapid responses

Re: World Medical Association’s tainted president, Ketan Desai

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) is the apex body of doctors in India having 2,80,000 members, committed to the professional upliftment of its members and profession. It is a proud moment for the IMA to have its Past President Dr. Ketan Desai elected and inaugurated as the President of the World Medical Association. This ascendancy has hurt the disgruntled persons and vested interests the most who are using handily available means to vent out their
frustration by availing every available trick. Dr Desai has been a member of the MCI since 1988 and has held the office of the President of MCI thrice in the years 1996, 2001 & 2009 respectively.

He has a track record of selfless devotion to the cause of medical profession and education. His tenure saw an all-round quality centric improvement in medical education in the country including invocation of regulatory measures which discomforted the powerful. As such, stringent initiatives in public interest initiated by Dr. Desai were always taken with a pinch of salt by vested interests. Resultantly they created several obstacles with intention of tarnishing his image, but he handled this onslaught with grit.

The bogey raised against him includes firstly that in the year 2010 as President MCI, he had shown favour to Gyansagar Medical College, Patiala for recommending permission to admit fresh batch without the college having an auditorium in lieu of the pecuniary favour and the other one that he had acquired disproportionate assets to his known sources of income. The Executive Committee of the MCI has 11 members including the President which takes the decisions. In case of Gyansagar Medical College, an inspection was carried out and the Executive Committee meeting dt. 5.4.2010 took a decision thereon.

After a false case was filed against Dr. Desai on 22.4.2010, in Delhi, Govt. constituted a team to inspect the said college which conducted its inspection on 29.04.2010 and concurred with the
recommendations of the Executive Committee, making it known to the Central Bureau of Investigation on 11.5.2010.

The Board of Governors nominated by the Govt. upon superseding the MCI directed inspection of the said college by the assessors who in their report concurred with the decision of the Executive Committee. Further, the case registered against Dr. Desai on this count has been stayed by the Supreme court which is in operation till date. The second case pertaining to Dr. Desai having disproportionate assets to his known sources of income. After the registration of the false case in Delhi on 22.04.2010, the Central Bureau of Investigation had conducted searches at his office at MCI, residences at Delhi & Ahmadabad, wherein in total Rs.53,600/- (around 760 Euros) had been recovered from him. Dr. Desai was never caught red-handed receiving any bribe of Rs. 2 crores (20 million) from any person, as alleged or otherwise. The CBI after conducting the searches had carried out detailed investigation of assets of Dr. Desai and his family members acquired between 1997 till 2010 for almost 2 years and did not find any evidence against Dr. Desai & filed a Closure Report in May 2012, which was accepted by the competent Court in December 2012. This vindicates the innocence of Dr. Desai and his family members on the count of corruption and possessing ill gotten money. As on date Dr. Desai has not been proved to be guilty of any of the allegations and he continues to be untainted & the tallest leader of the Indian medical professionals whom he continues to lead in an exemplary &
We read with interest the response to our editorial from Dr KK Aggarwal, the President Elect of the Indian Medical Association (IMA). Our editorial highlighted the fact that the World Medical Association (WMA) had lowered the bar for ethical standards by appointing as its President a person who faces a credibility crisis due to serious charges in Indian courts. Also, that the WMA had chosen not to seek information from sources other than the IMA, with whom Dr Desai has close ties before taking this decision.

Dr Aggarwal in his letter admits that Dr Desai has indeed faced serious charges in more than one case. Whilst his letter is freely peppered with rhetoric and praise for Dr Desai, it doesn't clarify the current status of the pending cases against Dr Desai including the one he appeared in a Delhi court on November the 7th much after the
IMA had assured the WMA that he had been absolved of all charges. As for the Medical Council of India and its record, which Dr Agrawal chooses to focus on, the scathing report of the committee constituted by the Indian Parliament, speaks for itself.

Corruption in Indian health care has serious repercussions on both medical education and delivery of care. It erodes the already precarious health care system. (Of course it remains to be seen whether Dr Desai is found guilty or acquitted by the court of any such misconduct.) Whilst the IMA has largely remained silent on these issues, we would expect the WMA to uphold its historical tradition of supporting the just cause of those in India who are fighting this menace. At the least we expect the WMA to respond to the substantive issues raised by us.

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Competing interests: No competing interests

26 November 2016
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The concerns raised by the senior professionals in the editorial needs speculation to the ethics of election to the prestigious posts of the World Medical Association (WMA). The persons holding the posts should have a clean image and their integrity should be beyond doubt. But how to decide the persons have a clean image or not? Who will be responsible for such a clearance? Does the WMA have a mechanism to verify the credentials of the nominations for the posts? Does mere reporting in the newspapers or social media amount to challenge of clean image? Or if the court does not find a fault with any allegations labelled against any specific person a valid proof enough to say that the person is of a clean image? Under such circumstances there should be certain standard guidelines which should be followed before being elected to the prestigious posts of WMA. I think some objective measures supplemented by recommendations of a search committee of the WMA should beforehand do the exercise at the time of nominations. It is very difficult to proof the misdoings of a person without a valid evidence and it may be taken as a fortune for that person. But certainly we need to look into the matter and frame concrete policy for the future.

**Competing interests:** No competing interests

22 November 2016

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The overtly generous tributes paid to Dr. Ketan Desai, recently reinstated World Medical Association (WMA) president, by Dr. K.K. Aggarwal, president-elect of Indian Medical Association (IMA), for his “selfless devotion” to improve medical profession are likely to be questioned by most ordinary doctors who are not involved with Indian medical politics. Dr. Desai has had a strong presence in regulation of Indian medicine for decades as evident from the fact that he was Medical Council of India (MCI) and IMA president for many years until he was arrested in 2010 by the CBI, highest law-enforcing agency in India, for alleged bribery and corruption. Dr. Desai is now free on bail but still waiting for criminal trial to begin as the next IMA president-elect staunchly defends Dr. Desai against the editorial in the BMJ.

The IMA president-elect has attempted to build a story that the criminal bribery charge against Dr. Desai involving Gyansagar Medical College (for which Dr. Desai was arrested by the CBI in 2010) is a “false case” as other reports on specific dates from MCI Executive Committee and Board of Governors would demonstrate. It is strange to find that the IMA president-elect has already concluded his own investigation and decided to acquit Dr. Desai from all charges of wrongdoings even as the highest law-enforcing agency in the nation (CBI) has filed charge-sheet in the court of law as Dr. Desai
awaits criminal trial to begin.

The IMA president-elect has also made a boisterous claim, without naming anybody in particular, that only some doctors with “vested interests” are playing this dirty game to target this noble and innocent man, Dr. Ketan Desai. Unfortunately, the sordid saga involving Dr. Desai and medical corruption in India is not so simple and has a long history which is known to doctors and ordinary people across India. The relentless attempts by top leaders of IMA/MCI to shield Dr. Desai and to maintain their grip over the medical education and healthcare regulatory system in India send an ominous signal to the ordinary people which is likely to further erode the abysmally low level of public trust on healers in India.

**Competing interests:** Author is the founding-president of People for Better Treatment (PBT), a registered charitable organization dedicated to fight medical negligence and eradicate medical corruption in India.

25 November 2016

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