

India's doctors raise questions over new president of top medical ethics body

November 3 2016

The recent inauguration of Dr Ketan Desai as the new president of the World Medical Association (WMA) raises questions from senior doctors in *The BMJ*.

Desai, an Indian urologist, stands accused of involvement in a conspiracy in 2010, whereby he accepted a bribe of 20 million rupees (\$450 000; £320 000 at the time). Desai denies the charge.

In an editorial, three surgeons based in Mumbai and Delhi ask why the WMA should accept someone with serious criminal charges pending against him.

They explain that in 2010, Desai's nomination as WMA president was suspended after he was removed from his post as head of the Medical Council of India (MCI). The council was later dissolved by an order from the president of India.

But in 2013, this suspension was lifted by the WMA after claims from the Indian Medical Association (IMA), which Desai once headed, that the charges against him had been withdrawn.

And yet, last month, Reuters news agency reported: "A court document dated Aug 3 shows Desai submitted an application to seek an exemption from a personal appearance in court that day due to an illness. The next hearing is scheduled for Nov 4."

The authors argue that, "under such circumstances, it is difficult for us to comprehend why the WMA has chosen to proceed with its appointment of Ketan Desai."

They question why the WMA seemingly did not find it necessary to approach the courts where cases have been filed against Desai but instead relied on information supplied by the IMA's secretary general, K K Aggarwal.

They ask why did the WMA not consult institutions working on medical ethics in India on this matter? And they point out that "to our knowledge the constituent bodies of the WMA, including the British, American, Canadian, and Australian medical associations, have made no inquiries of their own."

"We believe that organisations such as the WMA, "while acting democratically in choosing their leaders, should set the bar very high on ethical standards. In this case, by electing as its leader a man facing serious [criminal charges](#), the WMA has arguably lowered it," they write.

"Under normal circumstances, if an Indian colleague was elected to a prestigious international body we would have felt a sense of pride. But we speak for many of our compatriots, especially those who are bravely fighting corrupt practices in Indian healthcare, when we say that instead of feeling proud we feel disappointed and seek answers," they conclude.

More information: Editorial: World Medical Association's tainted president, Ketan Desai, [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.i5867](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.i5867)

Provided by British Medical Journal

Citation: India's doctors raise questions over new president of top medical ethics body (2016, November 3) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-11-india-doctors-medical-ethics-body.html>

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