



29 May 2021

Dr. Harsh Vardhan
Honorable Minister for Health & Family Welfare
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Nirman Bhawan,
Delhi-110002

Subject: Urgent request for fire safety audit of hospitals in the wake of fire incidents happening across the country

Dear Honorable Minister Vardhan,

Thank you for your letter acknowledging our first member meeting. We are happy to report that since that time we have continued to recruit new members and have been providing support for our members during these difficult and trying times. We also want to thank you for everything that you have done to deal with the unprecedented challenges of the coronavirus crisis in India.

On behalf of the Association of Healthcare Workers and Technicians (ACT), I write to you today to highlight our deep concern over the recent fire incidents in hospitals nationwide. Seven fires have broken out in Bhandara, Mumbai, Nashik, Bharuch, and Delhi, resulting in almost 80 deaths of patients and workers.

Due to the pandemic, our hospitals are running overcapacity, and workers are being stretched well beyond the available resources. Despite these challenges, workers are also faced with facilities that have inadequate fire prevention tools and measures. On April 24th, 15 people died in an ICU in Mumbai where the ICU did not have the mandatory sprinkler system. The ministry must take concrete action to prevent further incidents.

ACT represents dialysis technicians in over 50 facilities in the National Capital Region. These facilities are often attached or on the same campus as many hospitals. Our members provide an essential service to patients with end-stage kidney failure. It is estimated that about 200,000 more Indians every year will depend on our treatments critical to life. It is also estimated that the demand for dialysis is increasing at a rate of 31%, faster than other countries worldwide¹. Our members provide treatments to patients for 3-4 hours per session up to 3 times per week. Technicians develop long-term relationships with their patients, providing them lifesaving treatment.

¹<https://health.economictimes.indiatimes.com/health-files/dialysis-in-india-today-and-tomorrow/1233>



Technicians have been facing increased demands since the pandemic has started. Dialysis patients are already high-risk patients, and with the added risk of coronavirus, technicians are deeply concerned about ensuring safety standards to the highest levels. In a recent survey of our members, technicians said they have had to take on extra roles and responsibilities during the pandemic. Due to the high-risk nature of the work, technicians who have fallen ill must stay home to protect their patients; some of these workers do not receive sick pay, meaning they bear the financial burden to protect their patients. This has had a cascading impact on their colleagues by leaving them to work short-staffed. Shockingly, just over 20% of technicians reported not having access to adequate levels of personal protective equipment (PPE). And 50% of our members reported feeling unsupported by their employers.

We are also concerned about the long-term mental health impacts unsafe working conditions are having on technicians. In our survey, 42% of our members reported that working conditions negatively impact their mental health. Recent fire issues have only compounded the risks in the workplace.

We strongly believe that workers need direct influence and involvement in workplace safety. Democratically elected health and safety representatives are required for all health care settings nationwide. Workers also need training on health and safety to protect themselves and ensure that patients are also receiving the protections needed.

We ask for your leadership and appeal to your passion for the people you represent to take action now. The lives of our members and their patients depend on it. Fire inspections for all hospitals must start now. Your background as a medical doctor and reputation for a hands-on approach is why you are best suited to address this plea. We will support your efforts and offer our assistance in the fight for a better future for everyone.

Our association is at your disposal for further discussions. We thank you in advance for your response to the concerns raised in this letter.

Sincerely,

Indra Narayan Jha

General Secretary

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