

## 'Dr Death' Jayant Patel granted conditional bail

Indian American surgeon "Dr Death" Jayant Patel, who arrived in Brisbane Monday after being extradited from the US to face charges for 13 offences, including manslaughter, grievous bodily harm and fraud, was granted conditional bail by a Brisbane magistrate.

The offences relate to his employment as director of surgery at regional Bundaberg Base Hospital in Queensland between 2003 and 2005.

Magistrate Brian Hine Monday afternoon granted bail to Patel and ordered he provide a cash surety of 20,000 Australian dollars.

Patel will also have to live at a place approved by the director of public prosecutions, report to police three days a week and not leave Queensland or approach an international airport.

He will surrender his passport and cannot communicate with witnesses, reports the Australian Associated Press (AAP).

The families of former patients of Patel have heaved a sigh of relief over his extradition.

'Obviously the fact that he has arrived back here has been a huge weight lifted. We always kept the faith. We always knew it was going to happen. We never wavered in that faith even through all of the hiccups we have had, so we've always been very positive that that would be the end result,' Bundaberg Hospital Patients Support Group spokeswoman Beryl Crosby told AAP.

The 58-year-old doctor, dressed in jeans and mustard shirt, and his police escorts were the last to disembark from the Qantas flight from Los Angeles.

He was briefly placed in an airport security lounge, before being whisked away in a police motorcade to the Brisbane Watchhouse in the Queensland capital's central business district.

Three years and four months since concerns were first raised about his botched surgeries, in what is probably the most anticipated court appearance, Patel's bail hearing began at the Brisbane Magistrate's Court Monday afternoon.

Dubbed 'Dr Death' by the Australian media, Patel's case is probably the worst medical-negligence scandal in this country. He allegedly falsified his application to practise medicine in Australia and then falsified death certificates and refused patients' transfers to other hospitals to cover up 'botched treatment and surgery'.

Judy Kemps, whose husband was a patient of Patel and died after being operated on in December 2004, told AAP: 'I'm very apprehensive about it but I'm very excited that after all that hard years of work and everything that at last he is here.'

Patel had June 26 voluntarily agreed to his extradition to stand trial in Australia. US District Court Judge Dennis Hubel had set a deadline for Australian and US authorities to extradite Patel by July 21.

'I think people would understand that there are very serious charges, there will be many times when this matter will come before the courts before we see a formal committal hearing and beyond that a full trial,' Queensland Premier Anna Bligh told ABC Radio.

Patel, banned from surgery in two US states, was employed at the regional Bundaberg Base hospital for 200,000 Australian dollars (\$195,000) per annum in 2003. In late 2003, he was promoted to director of surgery at the hospital. On April 1, 2005, Patel's bosses signed on a \$3,547 business-class, one-way air fare for him to travel to the US despite him being neck-deep in accusations of fatal incompetence.

Welcoming Patel's return to Queensland, Federal Home Affairs Minister Bob Debus told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) that it shows the importance of international cooperation in making sure people cannot evade justice by crossing borders.

*Neena Bhandari* ( © IANS / India eNews)