

Bogus HIV testing kits endanger Indians: World Bank investigator

A noted India-born AIDS researcher in the US says that defective or sub-standard medical kits supplied by the government's National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) for testing HIV in different blood banks and hospitals in India has put a large number of Indians at serious health risk.

Kunal Saha, the researcher based in Columbus, Ohio, was appointed by the World Bank to investigate allegations of sub-standard HIV testing kits being distributed in India.

Now he is all set to expose the scam after having obtained permission from the bank to go public with the findings about 'the bogus HIV testing kits supplied by NACO and used by hospitals across India,' Saha said.

Saha and other members of the World Bank team discovered that that there was 'fraud' in distribution of HIV testing kits that has put Indian patients in serious danger of contracting AIDS from contaminated blood, he said.

Saha is known for his crusade against the medical fraternity in India after his wife's death from alleged wrong treatment. He has now got a nod from Ana Palacio, senior vice-president of the World Bank, to go public with potentially damaging information about distribution of dud HIV testing kits in India.

'In a letter, the World Bank has informed me that they have no intention to restrict me from my ethical obligation (as a medical doctor) 'to safeguard public health' in India,' Saha told IANS from Columbus Friday.

'The obligations imposed by the confidentiality agreement are intended to preclude improper disclosure of information obtained in the course of your work; however, they are not intended to restrict your ability to comply with your ethical obligations as a medical doctor to safeguard public health,' Palacio wrote.

'I am extremely happy that the World Bank has finally agreed to give me the green signal to go ahead with my findings.'

A team from the Department of Institutional Integrity (INT) of the World Bank came to India in March-April 2007 to investigate allegations of corruption in the distribution of HIV testing kits in different parts of India. Saha came with the World Bank team as a medical consultant from the US.

Two other doctors from India were also in the World Bank team, which visited a number of hospitals and blood banks across India, including several major centres in New Delhi, [Mumbai](#) and Bangalore. The final World Bank report is yet to be released formally.

World Bank funds a substantial portion of India's battle against HIV/AIDS.

Upon his return to the US, Saha wrote to Paul Wolfowitz, then president of the World Bank, about the discovery by the team.

'Since I was under a 'confidentiality agreement' with the World Bank, I sought special permission

from Wolfowitz so that I could go public with the information about the sub-standard HIV testing kits which has jeopardised the lives of innocent patients without violating the confidentiality agreement with the Bank,' Saha said.

'I plan to hold a video press conference in [New Delhi](#) from the US to come out with what we have found,' Saha said.

In West Bengal, a huge dud HIV testing kit scam was exposed in October 2006, pointing fingers at senior health officials.

Monozyme India, a Secunderabad-based company, has been charged with supplying expired blood test kits in West Bengal over a period of two years. Health workers fear that thousands of people across the state might have received contaminated blood, which was tested with kits whose expiry dates had been tampered with.

Saha is known for his ongoing legal battle against several eminent [Kolkata](#) doctors for the death of his wife, Anuradha Saha, from alleged 'medical negligence' when the couple came to India for a social visit in 1998.

Saha has formed 'People for Better Treatment' (PBT), a humanitarian society to help the victims of medical negligence and promote better healthcare in India.

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