

NRI doctor urges Patil to act on 'dud' HIV kits

India-born American scientist Kunal Saha has urged president elect Pratibha Patil to take action on 'defective' HIV testing kits provided by a government body.

Saha, who was part of a World Bank team that investigated the 'scam', says in a letter to Patil: 'I am writing to request you most humbly to please investigate and take immediate steps in this matter of great public significance.

'There can be no argument that any distribution of sub-standard/defective HIV-testing kits (or 'kits' to test other deadly viruses like Hepatitis C and Hepatitis B, that are also distributed through NACO) can pose a serious threat to unsuspecting patients across India.'

Saha has found in the probe that HIV testing medical kits supplied by India's National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) were defective. But NACO director general K. Sujata Rao has reportedly said, 'This investigator has no credibility'.

Saha, known for his crusade against the medical fraternity in India after his wife's death in 1998, allegedly due to wrongful treatment, has written: 'Recently, I was involved as a medical consultant by the World Bank to investigate charges of corruption and fraud relating to HIV testing of blood in India.

'After working on this project in April-May 2007, I discovered that there indeed has been fraud in the distribution of sub-standard HIV testing kits in the country of India which places a large amount of the population at serious health risk.'

Saha also complained to Patil against NACO.

'Unfortunately, in my endeavour towards helping abolition of the fraudulent and substandard HIV testing kits and to avert the potential danger of spreading HIV/AIDS to the innocent Indian citizens through tainted blood, I've received no cooperation from the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO).

'In spite of bringing the evidence of obvious flaws in the distribution of defective HIV testing kits in different hospitals and blood banks in India, NACO has remained staunchly defiant about the problems with these test kits,' he wrote.

Saha told IANS from Ohio: 'I had to write to the new president because instead of taking any remedial measures to stop the circulation of these defective test kits, NACO has brushed aside these serious charges and continued supply of the substandard 'kits' from the same manufacturers.'

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