

अखिल भारतीय जनवादी महिला समाज

All India Democratic Women's Association

23, V.B.P. House, Rafi Marg, New Delhi-110001

To
The Director General,
Indian Council for Medical Research,
New Delhi

Dear Dr. Aggarwal,

We are writing to you as head of the Institution which has permitted the violation of minimum human standards in the name of medical research. One of the ICMR institutes, the Institute for Cytology and Preventive Oncology in the Maulana Azad College used poor women as guinea pigs in a research project on cervical cancer. In several cases the lesions developed into cancer and many women have died. This is the most direct and horrifying example of how little value the lives of poor women have to Institutes like yours. There is prima facie evidence of criminal callousness leading to fatal results. But has even a single responsible person been punished? Have you even bothered to contact the women concerned? Why have you not given compensation to the women affected or in the case of death to their families? After the exposure of the project, it is reported that an enquiry committee was set up. However it is yet to begin its work. Mr. Director General, the people of this country and particularly women want an answer.

Moreover the reality is that this is not the only example. We, along with many other concerned citizens and women's groups have objected to the callous attitude and approach of the ICMR on the important question of clinical trials of harmful hormonal contraceptives on women. Thousands of women, for example who were used in the Norplant trials have not been followed up and no one knows what adverse impact there may have been on their health. In spite of objections you conducted trials of quinachrine and even now are experimenting with vaccines.

Clearly your agenda appears to be far removed from the health of women. We condemn and protest against your approach in research. It is unethical, it is inhuman and it amounts to murder. We also object to the secrecy with which you sanction projects of research and conduct trials. There should be total transparency.

We have heard about an ethics committee which is functioning. We demand that you take the initiative to call concerned women's organisations on the issue of unethical methods of using poor women in your studies.

In the project concerning cervical cancer we demand punishment for those responsible, compensation for those affected.

We hope you will treat this matter with the urgency required.

Thanking you,

Yours Sincerely,

Brinda Karat

Premila Pandhe

Kalindi Deshpande

Ashalata