



STATEMENT FROM MEDICO FRIEND CIRCLE

ACT URGENTLY TO ENSURE JUSTICE TO THE VICTIM

Governments, fulfil obligations to protect young medical professionals and their lives – NOW!

14 August, 2024

We, the medico friend circle (mfc), a group of pro people health professionals, health activists, doctors, students and researchers are deeply shocked and outraged by the murder and sexual assault of a post graduate trainee at the R G Kar medical college, Kolkata. We extend our sincerest condolences to the family and friends of the deceased doctor.

We extend our solidarity to the residents of the institution in their struggle and join you in demanding swift action against the perpetrators and justice for the victim.

This solidarity is based on our collective effort since 1974 to critically analyse the existing health care system and to evolve an appropriate approach towards health care that is humane and can meet the needs of the vast majority of the people in our country. We understand that the struggles of healthcare workers are connected to the struggles of patients, women, labourers, those facing caste discrimination, and others who are at the receiving end of day-to-day violence stemming from patriarchy, caste, capitalism, and other forms of hegemonic power.

A healthcare system can provide excellent quality of care that is empathetic and patient-centred only when the care workers are treated well. Physical safety is a bare minimum and we demand enhanced safety in hospital premises, wards, on call rooms, ambulances and hostels, including provision of furnished on call rooms, accessible toilets, deployment of security personnel, and installing security cameras. We also demand that the administration work in favour of the care workers and facilitate police action and ensure justice to the victim in RG Kar and victims elsewhere.

We also demand a friendly workplace that is free of all forms of harassment and discrimination. We urge the colleges across the country to go beyond anti-ragging regulations and create a positive atmosphere for learning and work. Only in such an environment can physical safety issues like we stated above be proactively addressed through constructive engagement between administration and care workers.

We have seen several reports of students and juniors being harassed sexually by their professors and their complaints being ignored. These survivors are being forced to continue suffering silently. We demand the immediate implementation of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act and Rules in all colleges (medical and others) across the country.

We demand that the benefits of these protections be not limited to staff doctors, but also extended to junior doctors, resident doctors, house staff, interns, post-graduate trainee doctors, nurses, and paramedical staff. The power hierarchies within healthcare system and the

predominance of women in underpaid care work leaves those women (and girls) at the lower rungs of the ladder especially vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse. At mfc, we have heard about these for decades and we continue to see reports of assaults and murders.

We want to especially point out that these protections be extended to the group that faces the most violence at hospitals — patients. We have seen several reports of patients being sexually assaulted, often in a sedated state. The verbal and physical violence that patients face have become normalised in various settings. In recent years, violence perpetrated against women in the labour room has received particular attention, but this is just the tip of the iceberg. Many in mfc have left their career in clinical practice, in disillusionment, and become activists and academicians, with the violence they saw was being unleashed on patients. All the above issues are seen in public as well as private health facilities, and the measures need to extend to both.

The pervasiveness of sexual violence especially against women and people of non-heteronormative gender identities indicates the distance to be traversed towards achieving gender justice in our country. These struggles are shared by women in various other settings outside the healthcare system as well. The unsafe working conditions and toxic environments are indeed a product of deep-rooted issues of caste, patriarchy, capitalism, and other ways of oppression and marginalisation. The specific case of violence against healthcare workers also need to be seen as a symptom of the disruption of doctor-patient relationship and breakdown of trust, as a consequence of the perception, no matter how false, of a healthcare system that is not pro-people, perhaps as one of the violent consequences of the deficiency of investment in health in the country.

In solidarity

medico friend circle