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I am a qualified and practicing psychiatrist and I come from a family of doctors in Chandigarh.

In 2014, there was a massive surge in the number of people seeking treatment for dependence on opiates like heroin and opium. This seemed to be a result of reduced availability of drugs like heroin and opium. Attendance touched 300-350 patients per day mostly at private hospitals & clinics where people started lining up as early as 4am to secure their medicines, which they could take at home or even at work. Many times guards had to be deployed to control the large numbers on any such day. This big increase changed the way psychiatrists treated addiction to opiates in Punjab.

The most widely used effective evidence based treatment for these patients was Opioid Substitution Therapy (“OST”) using the approved drug buprenorphine, which is a schedule H1 drug under Drugs & Cosmetics Act. Every day thousands benefitted in Punjab with this evidence based form of treatment, which has been and continues to be accepted and used all over the world.

On 18th Dec 2014, while on my way from Chandigarh to my usual Out Patient Department (OPD) at Khanna, a town in Punjab, I was forcibly stopped on the road by policemen, my car keys, mobile phone and buprenorphine tablets, meant for treatment at my OPD, were all seized. Totally shocked and waiting for some clarity I was kept at the Khanna Central Intelligence Agency staff office for about 14 hours before being taken to the Senior Superintendent of Police office in the night where I was informed that I had committed a serious crime of carrying a so called banned drug with me, my submissions about Drugs & Cosmetics, Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, my qualifications in the field of psychiatry, my right to dispense medicines to my own patients, my practice at a reputable hospital in Khanna where I'd helped thousands of patients in the previous year, all fell on deaf ears and a first investigation report was registered under the NDPS & Drug & Cosmetic Act full of falsified facts surrounding my arrest. It seemed as if I was treated no better than a petty drug peddler picked up by the police on the roadside while looking for prospective buyers.

I remained in jail for close to 45 days and was eventually released on bail by an Additional Sessions Judge, who in the bail orders has raised serious questions on the NDPS Act being applicable on qualified psychiatrists.

My arrest was followed by three more similar cases on fellow psychiatrists, two by Punjab Police and one by the Narcotics Control Bureau.

The psychiatrist community is still in a state of shock with a big fear of getting prosecuted for treating addiction patients, resulting in decreased availability of OST using buprenorphine and even if available the doctor is continuously scrutinized due to the falsely proclaimed 'banned' nature of the drug.

Patients who now have nowhere to go are very confused, asking themselves if being treated with medicines like buprenorphine is any different legally than buying heroin on the street.

My life has changed completely, my name ruined, still my patients search for me but practicing psychiatry, once a passion for me, has now become almost a phobia, I have to attend court hearings and am using all my time and energy trying to prove my innocence. My patients are suffering and my life is in a dreadful state just because some officers didn't understand my right to treat patients and some conflicting legal interpretations, which I thought were for my protection but they have done far more harm than good.

Thankyou