

EDITORIAL

Fire and Safety Standard of Indian Hospitals: A Lesson from AMRI - Kolkata Incidence

Abstract: Recent devastating fire in AMRI, one of the five star hospitals in Kolkata, India has shaken entire medical professionals, administrators and Governments. The possible violation of fire safety norm in this hospital which took ninety two lives needs a serious thinking regarding hospital fire safety in India or elsewhere in the world.

Key words: AMRI-Kolkata, Fire, 92 deaths, Hospital safety

Recent devastating fire in one of the reputed private five star hospitals of Kolkata (Calcutta, India) is not only shocking for entire world but also a lesson to be learned by everyone who are connected with medical profession and governance at large. The incidence took place on 9th December 2011 very early in the morning. Fire spread out swiftly from the basement of the Advanced Medicare & Research Institute (AMRI) Ltd., Dhakuria, Kolkata swirling from one ward after other and killed at least 92 patients in this hospital. Most of the patients died of burns, whereas many lost their lives because of suffocation caused by carbon monoxide accumulation all over the building. The Chief Minister of West Bengal immediately cancelled the license of the hospital and arrested the hospital's owners, and ordered a judicial investigation into the catastrophe. But, the families of those killed in the fire are still looking for an answer. Initial investigations revealed that the fire, which reportedly started in the basement, could have been caused by inflammable materials kept there. It is also observed that the hospital does not have proper entrance for fire brigade vehicles as the passage is blocked by many obstructive materials. If these are found to be true then definitely a serious crime was done by AMRI authority! [1].

As we know very well that many new hospitals are propping up in India, catering to a growing middle class and even some foreigners are looking for inexpensive, quality care. While India is gaining a good reputation for its medical talent, the construction codes and public safety regulations are lagging behind. Dr. Muzzafer Ahmed, a member of the country's National Disaster Management Authority said that a serious need to look into building safety codes and plan for fire while issuing the licenses for running the hospitals. It is also reported that in addition to the lapses in building codes and fire exit strategies, the widespread corruption across the country often makes it possible for code violations to be overlooked. We expect Government of India and all the state governments will take necessary action against such wide spread violation of fire safety by the hospitals of India immediately [2]. Government should also scrutinize before giving permission and giving additional facilities to any non academic hospitals on the basis of tagging "Research Institute" after their name. AMRI Hospital Kolkata should have given a thought about the safety aspects along with whatever their research work being carried out.

More often calamities occur then only retrospective thinking starts saying that this should have been done before hand and incident should have been avoided. Now it is a clear warning to Hospital Owners and administrators to perfectly plan out “On Sight Emergency Plan” of infrastructure and disaster management, tools and capacity to cope up. It could be fire, it may be earthquake or something else.

If AMRI Management would have given a little more thought in this regard before, this disaster would have been avoided or lives could have been saved.

At the time when role of the physicians and paramedical staff of AMRI hospital Kolkata was still much necessary to cope up with the situation and boost up the morale of professional community of India. We must also remember the service of fifty seven-year-old Dr Bishwanath Kahali, Professor and Head, Department of Forensic Medicine, SSKM hospital, Kolkata who worked tirelessly through out Friday night conducting post-mortem examination of victims of the AMRI fire and handing over the bodies to relatives who were in state of shock.

We should also remember the dedicated services given by two brave nurses from Kerala (PK Vineetha and Remya Rajappan) who died in AMRI hospital, Kolkata while saving lives of eight patients yesterday and the common citizens of locality who brave their lives and rescued many patients from the clutch of the death!

References

1. Cited in:<http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/kolkata-hospital-fire-two-more-amri-officials-arrested-157463&cp>
2. Cited in: (<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2011/1212/Deadly-fire-prompts-review-of-India-s-booming-hospitals>)