

## LETTERS



## WHISTLEBLOWING IN INDIA

## Which whistleblower is more vulnerable: the Indian doctor or nurse?

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In his article on protection for doctors who speak out in India, Chatterjee missed the bigger picture, which is mostly about imbalances of power.<sup>1</sup> Surprisingly, protection for nurses is not even mentioned. Nurses are the core of the healthcare team, they are closer to patients than doctors, and they have more opportunities for blowing the whistle. Indeed, of the 100 most recent hits in a PubMed search using “whistleblowing”, 39% of publications came from nursing journals.

Worldwide, legal frameworks for the protection of whistleblowers are simply not enough. Despite the law in the UK (Employment Rights Act 1996, amended as Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998), Bristol Royal Infirmary anaesthetist Stephen Bolsin had to leave for Australia,<sup>2</sup> although progress may have been made more recently.<sup>3</sup> Even in the US, although whistleblowing has been deeply culturally ingrained since the Lloyd-La Follette Act of 1912, individuals remain vulnerable to bullying and gagging. In a recent case uncovered by medical journals, two Texas nurses were criminally prosecuted for reporting a doctor to the state medical board over patient safety.<sup>4</sup>

India has deeply entrenched feudal hierarchies, defined by caste, sex, region, and religion. Only 27% of females completed at least a secondary education compared with 50% of men.<sup>5</sup> Along with untouchables and tribal peoples, women are not only discriminated against but almost excluded from society.

So, although calls for help for Indian doctors who dare to speak out are praiseworthy, a more profound social revolution is a prerequisite for moving forward.

Competing interests: None declared.

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- 2 Gooderham P. Changing the face of whistleblowing. *BMJ* 2009;338:b2090.
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- 4 Barrett S. Outrageous whistleblower prosecution fails: perpetrators severely punished. *Quackwatch* 2011. [www.quackwatch.org/14Legal/nurses.html](http://www.quackwatch.org/14Legal/nurses.html).
- 5 United Nations. Human development report. India. 2014. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/IND>.

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