SC forms task force to protect doctors: Key members & their role explained

The Supreme Court has emphasised the urgent need for a national consensus on standard safety protocols for medical professionals

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<mark>The Supreme Court on Tuesday constituted a national task force (NTF) of senior medical professionals to formulate comprehensive safety protocols for healthcare workers across India. This decision comes in the wake of the rape and murder of a trainee doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata, which has sparked widespread protests among the medical fraternity demanding enhanced safety measures.</mark>

The Supreme Court bench, led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud, took suo motu cognisance of the case, emphasising the urgent need for a national consensus on standard safety protocols for medical professionals.

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The CJI expressed deep concern over the lack of safe working conditions for doctors, stating, "We need to evolve a national consensus for a standard national protocol for safe conditions of work. Ultimately, what is equality under the Constitution if women cannot be safe in their workplace?"

Who are the members of the task force?

The newly established NTF comprises a distinguished panel of medical experts from various specialisations, including:

- Surgeon Vice-Admiral Aarti Sarin

- Dr D Nageshwar Reddy

- Dr M Shreenivas

- Dr Pratima Murty

- Dr Goverdhan Dutt Puri

- Dr Saumitra Rawat

- Anita Saxena

- Pallavi Sapre, Dean

- Dr Padma Srivastava

In addition to the core members, the NTF will also include ex officio members such as the Cabinet Secretary to the Government of India, the Home Secretary, the Secretary of the Union Health Ministry, the Chairperson of the National Medical Commission, and the President of the National Board of Examiners.

What will the task force do?

The NTF has been tasked with the critical responsibility of devising an action plan to ensure the safety and well-being of medical professionals, with a particular focus on preventing gender-based violence and creating dignified working conditions for interns, resident doctors, and non-resident doctors, according to an Indian Express report.

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The action plan will address several key areas, including:

- Enhancing security in emergency rooms and other critical areas.

- Implementing baggage screening to prevent the entry of arms.

- Restricting the number of non-patient visitors.

- Managing crowd control effectively.

- Providing restrooms and gender-neutral spaces for medical staff.

- Introducing biometric and facial recognition systems.

- Improving lighting and installing CCTV in all hospital areas.

- Arranging transport for medical professionals between 10 pm and 6 am.

- Conducting workshops on handling grief and crisis situations.

- Performing quarterly audits of institutional safety measures.

- Establishing a police force commensurate with hospital footfall.

- Applying the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act to medical establishments, ensuring the constitution of an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC).

- Setting up an emergency helpline for medical professionals.

The top court has also directed the NTF to submit an interim report on its proposed action plan within three weeks, with a final report due within two months. The task force is also expected to provide appropriate timelines for the implementation of its recommendations, ensuring they align with the existing infrastructure of hospitals across the country.