

MEDICAL RESEARCH



Medical research is desperately needed for Bhopal victims. Research that has been done in the past is insufficient and key aspects of the disaster and its aftermath have been ignored in research projects. Furthermore, new issues have arisen, necessitating research in those areas. Funding must be secured and a long-term research plan devised.

- **Not enough research has been carried out.** Studies done by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) studies were terminated as early as 1989 and the rest were terminated by 1994. Termination occurred without the prior

review of collected data, while project proposals and pleas for continuation of studies by investigators were ignored. The ICMR's full report on Bhopal was never even released. Research at the Bhopal Memorial Hospital Research Center, funded by the liquidated shares of Union Carbide for gas victims, does only clinical-technical research, and does not research problems specific to gas victims. Small scale research projects conducted by NGOs, clinics and individuals cannot effectively replace well funded, long-term government studies.

- **Vital areas of study have been neglected.** Despite expected neurological, hormonal, mental health problems/post-traumatic stress, and genetic damage in the second generation, these crucial areas have been severely under-studied. The failure to focus on women's health, gynecological, and reproductive problems has been a major stumbling block in effectively understanding the effect of gas exposure and possibly betrays a gender bias in the studies thus far conducted.

- **New areas that must be researched have emerged,** in particular the varied effects of exposure to water contamination among those living in the vicinity of the factory site. Union Carbide constructed the factory knowing that the storage and treatment methods for waste were likely to fail, contaminating ground water. According to local groups monitoring the water quality, contamination from the factory has now spread to sixteen wards and affects an estimated 16-20,000 people. The Fact Finding Mission on Bhopal found high levels of chemicals in the breast milk of water-affected women, and small studies conducted by the Sambhavna Trust Clinic indicated that about half of the people living in the contaminated area were suffering from multiple symptoms.

MISSING FIELDS IN RESEARCH

- Female reproduction
- Chromosomal aberrations
- Cancer
- Immune deficiency
- Neurological sequelae
- Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Children born after disaster

● **Treatment cannot be effective without more research** because the etiology of gas syndrome, and now water contamination and second generation damage, is all so poorly understood. This leads to poor prescription practices by doctors, and damaging, unsystematic treatment of gas victims, because neither doctors nor patients fully understand the nature or the relationship of the symptoms.

● **Financial backing is not ensured for any public research projects** on the Bhopal gas and water affected communities and private projects will remain inadequate because upward of 500,000 people are considered by the government to be affected.

What must be done?

Once a National Commission on Bhopal is established, they must undertake immediately

1. Securing the finances for long term medical research and monitoring.
2. A thorough review of research that has been conducted so far, and the preparation of an overall design for future studies.
3. The gathering and consulting of professionals with the competence necessary to undertake this project.
4. The prompt and transparent publication of results.
5. The integration of research findings with health care and long term plans for the care of the gas affected.

Who must do it?

The central government and the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, currently in charge of Bhopal issues, must collaborate to establish a National Commission that is capable of funding and directing, with public participation, long term medical research programs in Bhopal.

WE DEMAND that the proposed National Commission on Bhopal oversee rigorous, long-term medical research that includes not only laboratory studies of contamination effects, but exploration of new and existing therapies.

This padyatra is our march for justice and dignity until our last breath. 21 years is enough!

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TIMELINE

1984 Bhopal Gas Disaster

1985 Union Carbide refuses to release health studies. ICMR studies begun

1989 ICMR finds delayed physical and mental growth in children born after the disaster, and review committees emphasize that these studies must continue through puberty

1991 ICMR winds up studies on second generation

1994 ICMR winds up all studies

1994 The International Medical Commission on Bhopal concludes that "a lack of data holds its own tragedy by denying to affected individuals, especially children, proper restitution, rehabilitation and compensation."

1996 The Sambhavna Trust Clinic and Documentation center opens

2000 The Bhopal Memorial Hospital Research Center opens.