Is hospital biomedical waste plant going waste?

**Tribune News Service**

Chandigarh, October 2

Inmates of the Government Medical College and Hospital, Sector 32, and surrounding areas, more often than not, are forced to inhale suffocating air. Choking their breathing are acrid fumes and pungent odour that the smoke-belching hospital chimney spews out under the cover of darkness and away from the preying eyes of the media.

This was making staying and studying difficult, said a group of hostel students living in the vicinity of the hospital. In fact, some of them had even lodged a complaint with the hospital authorities concerned. Yet no effective steps were taken. Should this be happening when the hospital is said to have its own biomedical waste management plant and incinerator and shredder? It was a relevant question students had asked. Perhaps, the plant and equipment were either lying idle or were ill-equipped to take proper care of biomedical waste.

Several people, including attendants of in-door patients, visitors and those living close to the hospital had either called up The Tribune or come over to talk of this menace, playing havoc with their health.

It was surprising that such carelessness was being observed, when dealing with germ-infested and infected cotton, bandages etc., despite the machinery having been installed for scientific and safe disposal of the hospital waste.

There is the Biomedical Waste Management Act, 1998, which mandates the hospitals to handle their wastes in an environment-friendly and scientific manner. It was, thus, strange that even in Chandigarh, guidelines under the biomedical waste management were dumped and buried under heaps of hazardous waste material.

The Government Medical College and Hospital may not be the lone culprit. Going by official information, it is learnt that by June-end over a score of government institutions and private clinics in the Union Territory were ticked as "defaulters" of the Act. It is also in the knowledge of the Chandigarh authorities how rag-pickers collected disposable items from the hospital waste-- gloves, syringes, glucose bottles etc.--which frequently find their way out of the premises of key government medical institutions, causing further health hazard.

The Chandigarh Pollution Control Committee had reportedly served over 70 notices to various clinics, labs and hospitals etc. in January last for violating the waste management guidelines. Yet, it is not known what follow-up action, if any, was taken. In fact the committee, in collaboration with the Central Pollution Control Board, had got a study done in the late 90s to assess the quantum of biomedical waste in key medical and health-delivery institutions in Chandigarh. It had concluded that over 8,000 kg of this waste would be generated per day by the end of 2000.

This calculation is already obsolete, say sources. As per that study, the Government College and Hospital should be generating over 1,750 kg waste per day. The way it was being disposed of, as indicated by the complaints, unless checked effectively, pollution caused by the smoke and fumes from the hospital chimney would do more harm to patients and people than, perhaps the relief and cure it was otherwise supposed to provide. In the hospital, no one was willing to talk how the waste was disposed of or why. Yet, faulty disposal, as a routine, was admitted.

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ASHOK Pradhan
Chandigarh, June 15

BLOOD-SOAKED lumps of cottons, partially filled blood bags, used needles and syringes in the PGI don't necessarily go to the dumping ground or the incinerator. Some of these hang on in the floor traps and water closet posing health hazards.

According to a circular from Hospital Engineer, Civil Division No 1 — copy of which has been sent to the offices of Director, the Medical Superintendent and the Hospital Superintending Engineer among others — "There is a practice of throwing needles, needle cover, syringes and other waste material in the floor traps and water closet, which runs through the sewerlines being run under the Nehru Hospital and surrounding areas."

Though the Hospital Engineer highlights the engineering problem due to improper disposal of the waste like blockage, seepage in the hospital building etc, the former Indian Medical Association president Dr G.S. Kochar said, "These could pose health hazards too."

"All waste should be disposed of properly and regularly. If it remain scattered anywhere in the building it could create problems," Dr Kochar said. At times, these wastes may have to wait longer before being carried away after being noticed following a seepage or blockage.

The Hospital Engineer, in the June 11 circular, points out that during maintenance of the main operation theatre at level 4, a sewerline was fully choked with the needles, needle cover, syringes, bandages and other waste material.

The circular has requested all concerned to discourage such actions. Notably the incinerator at the PGI has a capacity of around 600 kg per hour, which besides disposing the PGI waste also receive hospital waste from nursing homes.

Regarding the circular, PGI Sanitary Inspector PR Dogra said, "These could be isolated incidents. PGI has a sophisticated system of waste disposal, which has received appreciation from various quarters."

When contacted, PGI Public Relation Committee chairman Prof Amod Gupta refused to comment.
2 hospitals face prosecution
Lapses in waste disposal

SARJIT DHALIWAL
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 10
As serious lapses have been detected in handling and disposing of biomedical waste by certain government civil hospitals in Punjab, the law-enforcing authorities have recommended prosecution of the offenders.

The lapses in the civil hospitals were detected following an extensive inspection drive started by the Punjab Pollution Control Board immediately after the Tribune highlighted the recycling of syringes, needles, gloves and other biomedical waste in this region.

Informed sources said the inspection team of the board found serious lapses in handling and disposing of biomedical waste at the Civil Hospitals at Ropar and Mohali. In the Ropar hospital, the shredder, which is used to destroy medical waste, was out of order and the autoclave was also not in use. The same was the case at the Civil Hospital, Mohali.

The sources said that when the team inspected the biomedical waste stacking room at Ropar, two teenagers were engaged in sorting out syringes, needles, gloves and other material. They were not wearing any gloves for protection.

The board authorities have refused to renew the permission given to these hospitals to dispose of biomedical waste on their own.

A senior officer of the board told The Tribune today that the two hospitals had been told to ensure the proper disposal of biomedical waste.

Most of the civil hospitals had been using the common waste treatment facility.

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Two hospitals face prosecution

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A facility, which was being provided by private contractors at Batali (Ropar), Pathankot, Amritsar and Ludhiana. The contractors collected the waste from the civil hospitals and disposed it of at these four places.

They charged money on the basis of the bed strength of the hospital concerned.

The board officer said as the Ropar and Mohali hospitals had committed serious lapses, their prosecution had been recommended under the Environment Protection Act. For any violation, there was provision of five years’ imprisonment and fine up to Rs 1 lakh under the Act.

Meanwhile, the board has directed the contractor of the Batali facility to upgrade the disposal system within 15 days. Till then, the entire biomedical waste collected by him would be diverted to the Pathankot facility for disposal.
PGI van caught dumping biomedical waste at Dadu Majra

**Tribune News Service**

**Chandigarh, October 5**

Confirming apprehensions of the Municipal Corporation that the PGIMER was dumping medical waste at the dumping ground in Dadu Majra, which is meant only for household garbage, officials of the corporation today caught a van of the institute dumping biomedical waste at the site.

The van carrying the waste was impounded, but was later let off after a warning to the PGI against following the practice. In a separate letter to the Pollution Control Board, the corporation has recommended initiation of prosecution proceedings against the PGI. They will also be required to give an undertaking that biomedical waste would not find its way into solid waste, failing which their vans would not be allowed at the site.

Sources in the MC said they had received a complaint against the PGI for flouting the rules of biomedical waste management and Environment Protection Act. To verify the complaint, Mr H.S. Khandola, Joint Commissioner, and Dr G.C. Bansal, Medical Health Officer, today, reached the site to verify the contents of the waste being disposed of.

To their surprise, they found

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PGI acts fast, 
sets up
probe panel

**Tribune News Service**

**Chandigarh, October 6**
A day after the PGI came under severe criticism for “improper dumping of biomedical waste” at a ground in Dadu Majra, the institute today reportedly ordered the formation of a “fact-finding commission” for looking into the matter.

Sources in the PGI said bogged by the allegations, senior faculty members continued to hold high-level meetings throughout the day before forming the committee.

The decision is significant as the PGI can find itself in serious trouble if the allegations of improper handling are established. A prescribed procedure for the same has to be followed.
PGI gives undertaking to MC
Pollution Control Committee initiates inquiry

THE PGI authorities have given an undertaking to the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation, assuring that the biomedical waste of the hospital will not be dumped in Dadumajra dump hereafter.

The Municipal Corporation officials revealed that in an undertaking by the Medical Superintendent of PGI, the institute has appreciated the Corporation's efforts in checking dumping of hazardous waste in the open.

"PGI has assured us that instructions have been issued to the officials concerned for dumping biomedical and other hazardous waste in the incinerator and not in the open," said an official, adding that PGI is also conducting an inquiry to fix the responsibility for this serious lapse and find out the reasons as to why biomedical waste was being dumped in Dadumajra, which is a criminal offence.

It is to be mentioned here that MC confiscated a PGI vehicle on Wednesday while it was dumping biomedical waste along with kitchen waste in the Dadumajra dumping ground.

An undertaking was demanded from PGI assuring that the same will not happen again.

Meanwhile, an inquiry is being conducted by the Chandigarh Pollution Control Committee in response to the request sent by MC yesterday asking the FCC to prosecute PGI for this.

The Municipal Corporation has handed over the bags bearing the stamps of PGI and warning of 'biohazard' and 'Danger, handle with care' to the FCC officials, who had reached the spot to supplement the same with the photographs of the impounded vehicle.

Member Secretary of the Pollution Control Committee, P.S. Dadwal, said he is compiling the evidence against the PGI and a report shall accordingly be sent to the chairman for suitable action.
Pollution control committee turns heat on PGI, GMCH

GMCH getting notices since 1999 on biomedical waste dumping

Two major government hospitals in the city — the PGI and the GMCH — are now under the scanner of the Chandigarh Pollution Control Committee for dumping biomedical waste at a landfill site in Dada Miani.

Two days after a PGI van was confiscated for improper dumping of biomedical waste, the committee has issued show-cause notices to the two hospitals.

The notices served to the GMCH states that the hospital has repeatedly failed to implement the pollution control measures and continues to dump biomedical waste at the Dada Miani dumping site.

The committee has asked the hospital authorities to comply with the Rules, accordingly.

Meanwhile, the law states that the contraventions of the aforesaid rules is punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years with fine of a maximum of Rs one lakh or both.

What does law say

As per Section 69(1) of BioMedical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 1998, biomedical waste shall not be mixed with other wastes. When a offence under this Act is committed by any government Department, the Head of the Department is deemed to be guilty of the offence and is liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.
Improper disposal of syringes continues.

MONKEY BUSINESS: Photo one: A monkey with his master arrives outside the Sector 32 Government Medical College and Hospital campus. Photo two: Finding a pack of used syringes lying along the roadside, he pops one in his mouth. Photo three: Even as he chews the syringe, he does not realise that a needle has been thrust inside by the disposer to prevent it from pricking someone. Photo four: As the monkey continues to have the taste of his own medicine, the outer shell falls to expose the used needle, and the perils associated with it. The monkey in action, and the hazards of improper disposal of syringes, was captured by The Tribune lensman Vinay Malik. — A Tribune photo feature.

CHANDIGARH TRIBUNE, 5 JUNE 2006