India: Day Two

May 4, 2017 By Greg Jefferys

After spending an interesting day in Mumbai with Parag visiting the sights and discussing the future of generic treatment for people with Hepatitis C our second day in India began with a meeting with V who has been my main associate in India since I began helping people around the world to access generic Indian Hep C medication.

V has worked with Indian NGO's for many years helping people around the world to access generic HIV medicines. When generic Hep C meds became available in India he was asked to start helping people to access these new meds as he already had extensive expertise in that area of work.

A mutual friend, Thai based activist Giten, introduced me to V within a month of me returning to Australia from Chennai in 2015. Since then we have built an incredible relationship of trust and cooperation that has enabled us to send generic Indian Hep C meds to thousands of people around the world.

And I have to say here that it was a steep learning curve.

We had to figure out numerous "tricks of the trade" for shipping meds around the world. We had to learn all the regulations related to shipping prescription medications for all the different countries that we shipped to.

We had to figure out the loop holes that would enable shipping to countries where shipping meds was a "grey" area and we had to figure out back door entry methods for places that blocked shipments of generics.

The variety of rules between different countries was truly vast. Some countries like the UK have very favourable rules that allow its citizens to import medicines for personal use with very few restrictions.

Other countries, like Denmark, Canada or Sweden have very draconian rules that prohibit any importation of medicines for personal use.

Then some counties, like the USA, have rules that are open to various interpretations.

So it took us a while to figure out how to label parcels, which couriers to use and so on.

In some cases, like the USA, our first couple of shipments took weeks to clear Customs along with heaps of paperwork for both ourselves and the patients to fill in.

In the early days some of our shipments were seized in Indian ports of exit and some were seized

in foreign points of entry.

Some parcels were return to us and some were destroyed.

Early in the process V and I agreed that shipping was our responsibility and that if a parcel was seized, disappeared or returned we either refunded the patient's money or found another way of getting the medicines to them.

I am proud to say that in the nearly two years that V and I have been working together every single person who has placed an order with us has received their medicines. If they were in China, or Russia or Sweden… anywhere on Earth, every single shipment has been delivered. Sometimes it took a few attempts and sometimes there were long delays as we worked out ways of getting the meds through but with patience and hard work V and I have always found a way through.

Apart from the shipping and Customs issues doing business in India also presented challenges because of India's currency laws and licensing requirements; not to mention the vast labyrinth of the Indian Bureaucracies.

However both V and I were committed to getting generic Indian medicines to the people who needed them and over the months we learned what we needed to learn and by one means or another were able to ship medicines to people with Hep C in just about every country on Earth.

So after having been through so much together via thousands of emails and the occasional phone conversation it was really amazing to meet V face to face.

As he was returning from an overseas trip he met us at our hotel and we jumped into his taxi and travelled to his home where we met his wife P and shared a wonderful meal together.

Of course V and I tried not to make the conversation too Hep C heavy for the benefit of our spouses however I have to confess Hep C issues did dominate the conversation a lot of the time.

Like Parag V is a devout man. A practicing Hindu who rises before dawn every day to pray and meditate and read the scriptures he share the same view as Parag that helping people access affordable treatment for their Hepatitis C is need as a way of combining work with his spiritual believes and practices.

Very aware of the laws of Karma and that God wants to see humans helping each other rather than exploiting each other, V is committed to helping those in need and using his talents in a way that both eases suffering and improves the quality of life for others

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