Medical ethical violations in Gaza

Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI) has issued an emergency appeal for medical supplies for Gaza after the virtual closing of the border by Israel. 44 patients have died since June, 2007, because of denial or delay in access to medical care, and 85 types of medicine defined by WHO as essential are out of stock. The threatened disruption to electricity would cripple the running of hospitals, including haemodialysis machines and ventilators. All these actions are war crimes, and PHRI has been petitioning the Israeli High Court of Justice (without success to date).

PHRI is also highlighting the coercion being applied to patients by the Israeli General Security Service to inform on others if they want permission to exit Gaza for medical treatment. It is noteworthy that PHRI is speaking out, not the Israeli Medical Association (IMA), which, as the official body, is mandated to challenge breaches of medical ethics. Indeed the IMA also continues to stay silent about the continued use of torture by Israel. A report by the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel,2 covering detailed testimony of nine Palestinian men tortured between 2004 and 2006, again makes clear how Israeli doctors form an integral part of the running of interrogation units whose output is torture. Doctors, several of whom are named, saw the prisoners at various points before, between, or after episodes of torture (which in one case led to spinal damage and disability), did not take a proper history, made no protest on these men’s behalf, and typically prescribed simple analgesia before returning them to their interrogators. There was also direct involvement in several cases by the Chief Medical Officers of the Israeli Prison Service and Police Service, and by no less than the Chairman of the Ethics Board of the IMA, all named. How long can this grotesque situation continue?

PHRI would welcome financial or other support at this critical time. Contact Hadas Ziv (hadas@phr.org.il) or Miri Weingarten (miri@phr.org.il). We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

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