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**BMJ**

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Attacks on medical personnel in Turkey

Re: Attacks on medical personnel in Turkey

22 November 2013

November 21, 2013

Letter to the Editor, BMJ

Re: Attacks on medical personnel in Turkey: a call to honour medical ethics and end violations of medical neutrality. *BMJ* 2013;347:f4933 doi: 10.1136/bmj.f4933 (Published 7 August 2013)

The fears expressed in our August editorial have been realized. The Turkish Government is planning a legal assault on medical neutrality. The draft health law referred to in our *BMJ* editorial includes provisions to criminalise the provision of emergency medical care in Turkey, not only to demonstrators, but to anyone in need of emergency medical assistance. It will overturn at a legal stroke the fundamental obligation of all health professionals: to treat the sick and the injured solely on the basis of health need. It will effectively make medicine an instrument of state policy, subverting its independence.

Article 33 of the draft law – currently under consideration by the Turkish parliament – states:

“All practices and procedures related to the delivery of health services shall be under the scrutiny of the Ministry of Health. With the exception of health services in emergency situations by authorized and competent persons until the arrival of formal health services, those who deliver or commission others to deliver health services without proper license shall be subject to imprisonment from one to three years and administrative fine equivalent to that of twenty thousand days.”

In addition, Article 33 indicates that, the presence of state ambulances at a demonstration site may be considered grounds both to prevent emergency medical care by competent, independent clinicians, and to prosecute them should they intervene. If passed, this law would criminalize independent medical care by qualified practitioners throughout Turkey and provide the Ministry of Health with unprecedented control over health care practices in Turkey.

The Ministry of Health and the Turkish government have a duty to support and protect health workers who are discharging their moral, ethical, and professional responsibilities to provide

care for the sick and injured irrespective of their political affiliation. Unfortunately, in response to the Gezi Park demonstrations, the Ministry of Health failed to provide adequate medical care to injured demonstrators – as it does in earthquakes and other medical emergencies. It also required medical personnel to report the names of injured demonstrators and medical personnel providing care, which were subsequently used to make arbitrary arrests of demonstrators and emergency medical responders.

Recent history is full of examples of state assaults on medical neutrality. We saw it in South Africa under apartheid. More recently we have seen it in Syria, and in the co-option of medical skills in Guantanamo Bay. It is vital that the international medical community unites in a single voice. We therefore urge doctors to join us in signing a letter to Minister of Health, Dr. Mehmet Müezzinoğlu, and the Turkish government, urging them to eliminate Article 33 from the draft health law and exclude any provisions that would undermine independent, ethical, non-discriminatory care to those in need.

Competing interests: All authors have read and understood the BMJ policy on declaration of interests and declare the following interests: None.

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