

Physician Advocacy in Times of War

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Since the horrific terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023 in Israel perpetrated by the Hamas terrorist group and the ensuing Iron Swords war, there has been another war raging in prominent medical journals in the form of editorials and letters to the editor. Multiple publications filled with misinformation and propaganda have questioned Israel's right to defend herself, have implicitly or explicitly provided justification for the terror, and have even questioned the legitimacy of Israel's existence. Rather than serve as a source of frustration and despondency due to abandonment by our colleagues, we believe this situation should serve as a call to action. Israeli physicians cannot afford to passively cede the arena of physician advocacy to parties with anti-Israel and even antisemitic bias. Doing so would be devastating to Israeli medicine and to the quality of care we deliver to our patients.

In general, political advocacy seeks support for policies at a national and international level. Especially in situations of conflict between nations or other entities, it aims to maintain critical trade relationships and professional collaborations. Physician advocacy is steeped in shared core values that drive our sense of

professional duty, animated by concern for human life and health for all patients without consideration of their race, gender, national origin, religion, or political affiliation. These values stand in stark contrast to the barbaric acts of terrorism perpetrated by Hamas and its cynical use of medical institutions and personnel. Perhaps the most significant reason for physicians to participate in physician advocacy are the core values of modern Western medicine, which were historically influenced by leading Jewish physicians worldwide [1]. Physician advocacy can serve the goal of maximizing the values of concern for human life and health for all patients through nurturing professionally fruitful international collaborations and institutional partnerships that advance medical care.

We acknowledge the hesitancy among physicians to engage in political advocacy lest unintentional biases impact patient care [2]. Some world-renowned medical institutions require their employees not to publicly identify their opinions on politics or health policy in the presence of patients [3]. However, we believe the duties of a physician include advocating on behalf of their patients. Israeli physicians and medical centers have built a strong network of connections over the years throughout Western countries. Given that yielding the physician advocacy arena to others endangers our pro-

fessional and academic relationships and in turn, threatens our ability to provide quality care to our patients, physician advocacy is justified and necessary. For example, an academic boycott [4] including medical institutions presents a real danger to our medical system and our patients.

We suggest that physician advocacy consist of the following core components:

- Dialogue with colleagues emphasizing the common values of concern for human life and health based on respect for persons of all faiths and backgrounds, nationality, or political affiliation
- Engagement with colleagues by inviting them to educational sessions that highlight the medical challenges faced in conflict, the emotional experience of health professionals caring for patients, and the lived experience of patients in need of medical care

In recent weeks, a group of German-speaking Israeli physicians established a political advocacy partnership with German Jews and non-Jews called *Ärztinnen und Ärzte gegen Antisemitismus* [Physicians Against Antisemitism]. The aims of this advocacy group are to lobby German medical organizations to issue public statements condemning the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023, demand the immediate release of all kid-

napped individual, and mobilize the German medical community to condemn rising antisemitism, including calls denying Israel's right to exist.

The means used to achieve these goals include:

- Bi-weekly webinars that bring together medical professionals involved in the treatment of victims of the 7 October 2023 terrorist attacks, including returned abductees. Each webinar should begin with a presentation of the medical and organizational challenges faced in response to October 7th and integrates the emotional experiences of those involved.
- The recruitment of German physician leaders to ensure that Israel's right to exist remains a standard principle within the German medical community.
- Use of technology and social media to increase distribution of our message to a wide audience (e.g., LinkedIn, Instagram, X [formerly Twitter], OpenPetition).

Since launching our initiative, we have hosted four webinars with an average of 160 participants each, for a total of 620 participants. Attendees have included physicians from varied specialties and backgrounds. Our peti-

tion has garnered over 570 signatures. As a result of our efforts the umbrella organization for German physicians, Bundesärztekammer, has issued a statement that reflects our three central aims [5]. Following this statement, multiple medical German medical organizations and professional societies have participated in our initiatives [6-8].

CONCLUSIONS

Active involvement of Israeli medical professionals in physician advocacy are essential to the quality of medical practice in Israel. Israeli physicians should utilize modern technology to make their voices heard with messages that reflect our shared ethical values with physicians around the world. We hope that Israeli physicians in all specialties will join our efforts to advocate on behalf of our profession and those we serve. If we do not, nobody else will.

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Capsule

Perturbing T cell actin with PD-1

When engaged by its ligands, the receptor programmed cell death-1 (PD-1) inhibits the activation of T cells stimulated through the T cell receptor. Alleviating this effect is the basis of checkpoint inhibitors that promote antitumor immunity. **Paillon** and colleagues showed that PD-1 signaling inhibits the formation of an immunological synapse between T cells

and their target cells by preventing the remodeling of the actin cytoskeleton in a manner independent of its tyrosine-based signaling motifs. These findings suggest an alternative mechanism by which PD-1 regulates immune responses.

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