

LETTERS

ATTACKS ON MEDICAL PERSONNEL IN TURKEY

We must unite against health law that threatens medical neutrality in Turkey

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Our fears of an assault on medical neutrality by the Turkish government have been realised. The article of the draft health law referred to in our *BMJ* editorial would criminalise the delivery of emergency medical care to everyone in need, not only demonstrators.¹ The mere presence of ambulances would be considered grounds to prevent emergency medical care by competent independent doctors, and to prosecute and punish those medical responders with up to three years of imprisonment and a hefty administrative fine. The law would legally obstruct health professionals from fulfilling their fundamental obligation to treat the sick and the injured solely on the basis of health need and would provide the Ministry of Health with unprecedented control over healthcare practices.

The Ministry of Health and the Turkish government have a duty to support and protect health workers who are adhering to their moral, ethical, and professional responsibilities to provide care for the sick and injured, irrespective of 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 other medical emergencies. It also required medical personnel to report the names of injured

demonstrators and medical personnel who provided care, which resulted in arbitrary arrests of demonstrators and emergency medical responders.

Recent history is full of examples of state assaults on medical neutrality. It is vital that the international medical community unites in a single voice. We therefore urge doctors to join us in calling on the minister of health, Mehmet Müezzinoğlu, and the Turkish government to eliminate Article 46 (formerly Article 33) from the current draft health law and exclude any provisions that would undermine independent, ethical, non-discriminatory care to those in need.

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Full response at www.bmj.com/content/347/bmj.f4933/rr/673686.

1 Iacopino V, Nathanson V, Kloiber O, Chrispin E, Heisler M, Dunevant D, et al. Attacks on medical personnel in Turkey. *BMJ* 2013;347:f4933. (7 August.)

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