

Necessary medical assistance – if the Iranian authorities allow it

EDITORIAL

THOMAS BREMNES

thomas.bremnes@unn.no

Thomas Bremnes, specialty registrar in psychiatry, University Hospital of North Norway, and member of the Norwegian Medical Association's Human Rights Committee.

The author has completed the ICMJE form and declares no conflicts of interest.

The Iranian authorities arrest doctors who practise their moral duty to provide medical assistance to all who need it. We cannot accept this.

Imagine that as a doctor in a hospital or accident and emergency department you are faced with injured patients, but the authorities refuse to allow you to stop a bleed or treat a fracture because the patient has beliefs or a political stance that are not accepted; and that if you nevertheless manage to give the necessary medical assistance, you risk arrest and criminal prosecution. This is the reality for our colleagues in Iran [\(1\)](#).

The practice of medicine is essentially an ethical matter, and it is our duty to use our medical knowledge and moral prudence to help all those with medical needs, irrespective of sexual orientation, beliefs or political stance. To be prevented from giving necessary medical assistance to patients is unthinkable for most of us and contravenes the fundamental principles of medical ethics. It is also a clear breach of human rights.

In meetings with the Norwegian Medical Association's Human Rights Committee, Iranian doctors working in Norway express deep concern for their colleagues in their home country. They tell of colleagues and friends who have been arrested for providing necessary medical assistance to persons with a political stance or beliefs that are not acceptable to the Iranian regime. Their concerns have a basis in reality and are well documented. The Iranian doctors

request the Norwegian Medical Association's support in the fight against the practices of the Iranian regime, and they want the association to use both its national and international channels to highlight the regime's misdeeds.

«To be prevented from giving necessary medical assistance to patients is unthinkable for most of us and contravenes the fundamental principles of medical ethics»

Iranian doctors who demonstrate against the tyranny of the authorities meet with violent reactions from the regime. Last year, a female surgeon was killed in a peaceful demonstration in Teheran [\(2\)](#). A number of photos and videos from demonstrations in Iran show that the authorities prevent doctors and other health workers from assisting injured and wounded demonstrators who have been subjected to violence by the Iranian police or Revolutionary Guard [\(3\)](#). Doctors are instructed to report wounded demonstrators to the authorities so that they can be prosecuted, and they themselves risk imprisonment for helping injured and wounded demonstrators. For many years now the Iranian regime has also been compelling Iranian doctors to produce fake death certificates and coercing them into fabricating information [\(4\)](#).

Iranian doctors are forced to work unethically and cannot practise their profession in line with our fundamental principles of health ethics [\(4\)](#). Iranian doctors in Norway tell the Human Rights Committee that Iranian authorities do not respect the doctors' autonomy and the principle of medical neutrality. These factors form a very poor basis for ensuring that everyone in Iran receives the medical assistance that is their human right. The Norwegian Medical Association's Human Rights Committee works to prevent and monitor these human rights violations and to enhance understanding of the association between health and human rights.

In light of the demonstrations and reports from Iran, the World Medical Association adopted a resolution in October last year urging the Iranian authorities to comply with human rights, including the right to peaceful demonstrations [\(5\)](#). The reports on which the resolution is based suggest that the Iranian regime uses ambulances to transport arrested demonstrators to prison and that other medical equipment and facilities are also used for purposes other than medical assistance [\(4\)](#). The World Medical Association further urges the Iranian authorities to respect doctors' autonomy, particularly their ethical duty to provide assistance to all who have medical needs, as well as to ensure that medical equipment and facilities are only used for health purposes [\(5\)](#).

In a letter to the Iranian embassy in Norway, the president of the Norwegian Medical Association, Anne-Karin Rime, has conveyed that we cannot accept that an increasing number of doctors and other health workers are being threatened, arrested and tortured in Iran for carrying out their normal medical work [\(6\)](#). The working conditions for doctors and other health workers in Iran are totally unacceptable, and the Iranian authorities must know that the world is watching and reacting.

Political attention is one of the tools that both the Norwegian and international medical associations are employing in regard to this. The World Medical Association and the Norwegian Medical Association demand safe working conditions for all doctors and other medical personnel in Iran. Health workers have a right and duty to provide necessary medical assistance, and all patients with medical needs have a right to assistance, irrespective of sexual orientation, beliefs or political stance. Our Iranian colleagues need our support and solidarity. We must stand up and protest against the Iranian regime's practices for as long as it is necessary.

REFERENCES

1. Center for Human Rights in Iran. Iran Protests: More Doctors Treating Protesters Killed, Tortured and Detained.
<https://iranhumanrights.org/2023/02/iran-protests-more-doctors-treating-protesters-killed-tortured-and-detained/> Accessed 8.9.2023.
2. Weinthal B. Iran's regime kills a female surgeon during doctors' protests in Tehran. The Jerusalem Post 29.10.2022. <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iran-news/article-720973> Accessed 8.9.2023.
3. Christiansen H, Ismaeli A. Hun ble skutt og såret da hun demonstrerte. Men hun tør ikke dra til sykehuset for å få hjelp. Aftenposten 25.10.2022. <https://www.aftenposten.no/verden/i/Moolmo/hun-ble-skutt-og-saaret-da-hun-demonstrerte-men-hun-toer-ikkedra-til-sykehuset-for-aa-faa-hjelp-> Accessed 8.9.2023.
4. Yazdankhah S, Khusrawi A. Regimet i Iran tvinger leger til uetisk arbeid. Tidsskr Nor Legeforen 2022; 142. doi: 10.4045/tidsskr.22.0720. [PubMed] [CrossRef]
5. World Medical Association. WMA Resolution On Human Rights Demonstrations In Iran. <https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-council-resolution-on-human-rights-demonstrations-in-iran/> Accessed 8.9.2023.
6. Den norske legeforening. In support of the Iranian people.
<https://www.legeforeningen.no/contentassets/fe16427a1dc14c6d92980c3f118b5be8/in-support-of-the-iranian-people.pdf> Accessed 8.9.2023.
