

## Medical help for victims of violence in Gujarat

I want to appeal to all of you to take up the issue of denial / apathy by Gujarat state machinery to provide medical help / care to riot victims. Thousands of Muslims are suffering as they are not provided with any medical care by state nor can they approach private carers as they are certain they will be turned away. They are extremely scared to approach public health services as they fear they will be killed. Reports indicate that Hindu doctors are 'warned' not to cater to Muslim patients. This is a gross violation of human rights. Are there any international norms regarding victims of communal violence that ensure right to health care? Gujarat is worse than that as it is clearly a case of ethnic cleansing.

**Jaya Velankar, address**

## Doctors advertising, and drug companies' pressures

I enclose an advertisement which appeared in the Thane Plus edition of *The Times of India*, August 19, 2001. It gives details of a prominent psychiatrist's schedule, his services and hospital address where he can be contacted. This is blatant advertising to procure more patients. This colleague has gone overboard and crossed all lines of ethics.

It is strange that a reputed newspaper like the *TOI* should actually comply despite knowing that advertisement is not allowed in the medical profession.

Second, medical representatives have been watching me with the help of chemists to see whether I was prescribing their drugs, and if not, which drugs were prescribed instead. This is clearly encroaching on my liberty to prescribe the drugs of my choice. They actually tell me the details of drugs I had prescribed and how their product was not pushed despite their requests.

Thirdly, some doctors in Mumbra, Kalwa and areas surrounding these suburbs display their signboards. These boards are not close to their hospitals, but at strategic locations nearly five km away from the hospital, giving details of doctors, their services and directions on how to get there. A board for a Mumbra hospital was found outside Panve! At regular intervals the signboard is repeated, reminding the traveller about the hospital. Is this ethical?

I hope FMES will look into these issues and let us have guidelines on what actions to take.

**Name withheld on request.**

## Biodatas of writers in *IME*

I urge you to include the pertinent bio data of authors who are published in *IME*. It is important to know the author's background, training or experience before one can interpret her/his article or opinion piece in the journal. Such information would allow the reader to put the piece in perspective.

**Dr Meenal Mamdani**, Assistant Chief (retd.), Department of Neurology, VA Hospital, Hines, IL USA.

## Capitation fees

I disagree with the extract from S Devraj about capitation fees for colleges. If an individual's caste can guarantee a seat in the medical college or an engineering college, why not money? Men of truth should also be men of conviction and not only politically correct.

**Dr Nagraj G Huilgol, address**

## Respect doctors' ethical obligations

Hospital director Thys van Mollendorff was fired because he condoned the provision of postexposure prophylaxis to rape survivors in the public Rob Ferreira hospital in Mpumalanga province, South Africa.

We believe that the actions of the Mpumalanga MEC for Health, Ms Sibongile Manana, who used a government tribunal to terminate the services of Dr Thys von Mollendorff, are ethically indefensible. We call on her to reconsider her actions in the light of doctors' universally recognised ethical obligations to their patients, and to reinstate Dr von Mollendorff.

Political interference in healthcare delivery was unambiguously denounced by the World Medical Association at the 38th World Medical Assembly in October 1986, as follows:

"Physicians must have the professional freedom to care for their patients without interference. The exercise of the physician's professional judgement and discretion in making clinical and ethical decisions in the care and treatment of patients must be preserved and protected.

"Physicians must have the professional independence to represent and defend the health needs of patients against all who would deny or restrict needed care for those who are sick or injured."

Dr von Mollendorff acted within the letter and spirit of this declaration. To victimise him for having defended the highest principles of his profession, and for standing up for his mostly vulnerable and poor patients, is unjust in terms of all civilised and humane ethical standards.

Moreover, we believe that the MEC's actions go against President Thabo Mbeki's call for volunteerism, since the services rendered by GRIP were funded by voluntary contributions from the greater Nelspruit community, and were part of the victim empowerment programme, officially mandated in terms of health policy.

**Prof Willem Landman, Professor of Philosophy, University of Stellenbosch, Pretoria, South Africa, and 11 others.**

## Errata

The page numbering of the January-March 2002 issue was inadvertently carried forward from the previous volume's numbering.

In the Financial Report printed on the back page, the total expenditure is wrongly mentioned as Rs ----. The correct figure should be Rs----. (Rita to check this and write out the wrong and correct numbers.)