

No agency, including the police and judiciary can order a doctor to act contrary to medical ethics.

An honourable way out for a dissenting doctor:

The section of the Tokyo declaration referred to above was expanded in 1991 in Malta in 'WMA Declaration on Hunger-Strikers'. The ethical conflict between the doctor's moral obligation to save life and respect for the patient's autonomy was considered. Whilst upholding the stand taken in Tokyo, it advised those doctors who could not accept the patient's decision to refuse medically administered nourishment to hand the patient over to another doctor.

Why, then, do we see such unethical "obedience of orders?"

Ignorance of ethical norms is inexcusable on the part of the

medical practitioner. Medical colleges and the Medical Councils must be censured for not putting forth clear guidelines.

Under the circumstances it is up to us to rectify the situation. Should one or more of our colleagues face action for refusing to obey patently unjust and unethical orders, the rest of us must rally to their defence and make the authorities realise that right must prevail.

Failure to act will take us closer to the horrors of domination by the state and those in power exemplified by acts under the Third Reich. "Theirs is not to question why; theirs is but to do and die" is now being challenged even by armies. As members of a profession intended to show the utmost compassion, we of all people, must not permit might to prevail over right.

Journal of Medical Ethics

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We desperately need a similar body in India. Shall we make a start? (*Please see page 9*)