

<http://www.bmjjournals.org/cgi/eletters/334/7599/871-e>

BMJ

(accessed May 1 07).

## Disturbing distortions

1 May 2007

 Rita Giacaman,

Professor

*Institute of Community and Public Health, Birzeit University, Occupied Palestinian Territory*

Send response to journal:

[Re: Disturbing distortions](#)

It is all too easy for the president of the Israel Medical Association's (IMA) Yoram Blachar to denounce calls for boycotting the IMA, and to dismiss as 'lies' the organization's shameful record on torture, its silence in the face of civilian deaths and injuries in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and Lebanon and the destruction of the Palestinian infrastructure, economy and health system, as well as other forms acquiescence to Israel's grave violations of Palestinian rights, including the right to health. These have been well documented by a variety of reliable sources. Indeed, we are still awaiting any form of IMA protest against the persistent Israeli violations of all the pertinent human rights conventions of the 'civilized world', as other Israeli groups have done, such as Physicians for Human Rights Israel, B'Tselem and various others.

Instead of dwelling on Yoram Blachar's mystification of facts - being medically neutral is a different concept from being apolitical, with the latter contradicting the very concept of medical ethics - and falling into the trap of counting destructions, dead bodies and injuries in the OPT compared to Israel (albeit at far higher proportions in the OPT than in Israel) let us address the principal issues.

The IMA seems to focus its attention on treating the symptoms, i.e. the consequences rather than the causes of death, injury, destruction, distress, misery and a host of other health problems associated with the social suffering of war. And, of course, the cause of all these tragic events is Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. The IMA's focus on symptoms seems to be a strange form of evasion for a medical association that ought to search for the root cause of ill health to provide a radical cure, instead of a palliative treatment to a recurring disease.

Blachar boasts of 'tens if not hundreds' of Palestinian who receive medical care in Israel each year. This only adds insult to injury. According to this bizarre logic, we must thank Israel for having destroyed the Palestinian health system, infrastructure and economy, and then offering some victims treatment at Israeli hospitals? No, thank you, Palestinians do not want your charity. We want to exercise our right to freely work towards the reconstruction and development of our

own society. We want justice and freedom. Yet Israel's ongoing occupation and oppression are blocking such possibilities, and in the process, hopes for a just peace.

Yoram Blachar may find some Palestinian counterparts that are willing to engage in what he calls 'mutual cooperation'. Such 'patting each other on the back', or 'I am good you are good' initiatives, without further action to deal with the root cause of ill health, have been tried repeatedly in the past, with very little outcome, if any. Going around the fundamental issue of 'Israeli occupation is the cause' by 'doing something', will not absolve the IMA from its ethical responsibility of taking a stand, calling for an end to Israel's military occupation and oppression. On the other hand, should the IMA decide to take this courageous and ethical path – taken by various human rights, women's and medical groups in Israel - by clearly stating their opposition to military occupation and Israeli violations of international law and basic human rights, and calling for the end of Israeli military rule and a just peace as they complete joint humanitarian and health activities with Palestinians, then they are likely to be rather more effective and will be welcomed by Palestinian counterparts based on this platform of equality and justice.

Competing interests: I declare that I have a conflict of interest: Israel is occupying my land, and threatening my society with destruction.