


# Isn't it time for health professionals to shift their focus from preaching politics to promoting peace?

Naomi T. Katz<sup>A,B,C,D,\*</sup>  (MBBS, FRACP, FACHPM, GDipBioethics, PhD Candidate, Palliative Care Physician), Merav L. Katz<sup>A</sup> (BSc, MD, GP Registrar), Nikki R. Adler<sup>E</sup> (Bsc, MBBS, PhD, Dermatologist) and Jack Green<sup>B</sup> (MBBS, FACP, Dermatologist)

For full list of author affiliations and declarations see end of paper

## \*Correspondence to:

Naomi T. Katz  
 Alliance Against Antisemitism in Healthcare,  
 Melbourne, Vic., Australia  
 Email: [ntkatz@student.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:ntkatz@student.unimelb.edu.au)

## ABSTRACT

The magnitude of suffering on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides of the current war is beyond comprehension. Political agendas, misinformation and bias related to the conflict are being seen far too frequently in healthcare and medical academia. We believe it is time for healthcare professionals to redirect our attention away from politics and use our medical training to advocate for peace, care, and the welfare of all people, regardless of which side of the conflict they fall into. Politics in the workplace, particularly when disseminated information is divisive and, at times, based on opinion rather than fact, risks significant harm to patients, their families, and healthcare staff, as well as to institutional reputation. If we genuinely care for the well-being of patients and staff, we must lead by example and prevent healthcare systems and medical journals from being hijacked by politics.

**Keywords:** antisemitism, conflict, cultural safety, ethics, harm, healthcare, politics, war.

The current Israeli–Palestinian conflict has deeply affected both sides and sparked an infiltration of politics into healthcare, a sector traditionally dedicated to healing. Anti-Israel sentiments and antisemitism escalated quickly after the 7 October 2023 massacre by Hamas against Israeli civilians – Jews, Arabs and foreign nationals alike,<sup>1</sup> with tangible consequences. In a survey of 265 Victorian Jewish healthcare professionals and students, since 7 October 2023, almost half (48%) of the respondents have felt compelled to hide their Jewish identity, and 33% have experienced antisemitism in the workplace, often feeling unsafe to escalate their experiences.<sup>2</sup> Such discrimination would not be tolerated for other minority groups, nor should it be. Kingsbury and Greene have described how a ‘wave of open Jew-hatred by medical professionals, medical schools, and professional associations in the wake of the Hamas slaughter suggests that a field entrusted with healing is becoming a licensed purveyor of hatred’.<sup>3</sup>

Only weeks after 7 October 2023, the Australian Medical Students Association (AMSA) issued a factually incorrect statement blaming Israel for historical oppression and attacks on Gaza. Following criticism, it was retracted, and an apology released.<sup>4</sup> However, the motivation for such a statement is disconcerting and underscores the problematic nature of healthcare organisations engaging in politics.

Commenting on the Israel–Gaza conflict, the Australian Medical Association (AMA) called for all parties to ‘respect established International Humanitarian Law and not use health facilities as military quarters or depots...’.<sup>5</sup> If organisations choose to involve themselves in politics, statements must be nuanced and balanced and include recognition of what is beyond the scope of medical expertise. We suggest that a balanced statement would include explicit condemnation of any organisation that deliberately embeds its terrorist infrastructure within and underneath hospitals.<sup>6</sup>

The implications of politics infiltrating healthcare are real, particularly in an era where trust in medicine and institutions is already eroded. Allowing politics in the workplace risks deepening existing social divisions, fostering hostile workplace

**Received:** 3 April 2024  
**Accepted:** 1 May 2024  
**Published:** 14 May 2024

**Cite this:** Katz NT *et al.* (2024) Isn't it time for health professionals to shift their focus from preaching politics to promoting peace? *Australian Health Review* doi:10.1071/AH24119

© 2024 The Author(s) (or their employer(s)).  
 Published by CSIRO Publishing on behalf of  
 AHHA.

environments, and allowing implicit biases to fester. We are witnessing an urgent need to address an alarming lack of cultural safety in healthcare.

In 2019, an Ohio doctor was fired after tweeting her intention to ‘purposely give all the yahood (sic) the wrong meds’.<sup>7</sup> Yahood is the Arabic word for Jews. This was before 7 October, but things are no better. In the UK, allegations have surfaced recently of a visibly Jewish 9-year-old boy being mistreated and denied appropriate care by ‘Pro-Palestinian’ nurses, with the child and his family now hiding their Jewish identity when seeking healthcare.<sup>8</sup> Closer to home, a list was recently found in a secure area of Melbourne’s Royal Children’s Hospital outlining medicines and equipment (with inflated prices) to be supplied to the Gazan Ministry of Health (run by Hamas).<sup>9</sup> Serious questions about the presence of this list have been asked.

Physicians and medical bodies outside of Israel and Gaza are misguided if they think their actions will meaningfully alter local political and military events. Meanwhile, allowing politics to infiltrate our local healthcare networks is compromising cultural safety for patients, families, and healthcare workers. The fundamental principles of medicine emphasise the care and well-being of all, irrespective of political background. It is time for the medical community to focus on upholding these principles and avoid political entanglements to ensure that healthcare remains a neutral, safe space for everyone.

## References

- 1 The October 7th Geo-visualization Project. Mapping the Massacre. 16 March 2024. Available at <https://oct7map.com/> [accessed 16 March 2024].
- 2 Alliance Against Antisemitism in Healthcare. Workplace Experiences Since October 7: A Survey. Alliance Against Antisemitism in Healthcare; 2024.
- 3 Kingsbury I, Greene J. Bad Medicine. *Tablet*, 16 March 2024. Available at <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/science/articles/antisemitism-medical-institutions> [accessed 16 March 2024].
- 4 Hill B. Jewish doctors intervene. *The Australian Jewish News*, 26 October 2023. Available at <https://www.australianjewishnews.com/jewish-doctors-intervene/>
- 5 Australian Medical Association. AMA statement on the conflict in Israel and Gaza. 10 March 2024. Available at <https://www.ama.com.au/articles/ama-statement-conflict-israel-and-gaza> [accessed 10 March 2024].
- 6 The Israel Defense Forces. Hamas’ Operations in Hospitals. 10 March 2024. Available at <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/hamas-operations-in-hospitals/> [accessed 10 March 2024].
- 7 Burke M. Ohio doctor fired after anti-Semitic tweets surface, including threat to give Jews ‘wrong meds’. *NBC News*, 3 January 2019. Available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ohio-doctor-fired-after-anti-semitic-tweets-surface-including-threat-n953916>
- 8 Luck F. Hospital investigating claims ‘visibly Jewish’ nine-year-old child ‘mistreated by Pro-Palestine nurses’. *Leading Britain’s Conversation*, 22 March 2024. Available at <https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/jewish-child-hospital-nhs-treatment-pro-palestine-manchester-rachel-rile/>
- 9 Ferguson J. Probe into why Gaza medicine wishlist was in secure area of Melbourne’s Royal Children’s Hospital. *The Australian*, 16 April 2024. Available at <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/probe-into-why-gaza-medicine-wishlist-was-in-secure-area-of-melbournes-royal-childrens-hospital/news-story/baab2f7ca20b18e2aaff5b5bcd919793> [accessed 16 April 2024].

**Data availability.** Data sharing is not applicable as no new data were generated or analysed during this study.

**Disclaimer.** The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of, and should not be attributed to the publisher, the journal owner or CSIRO.

**Conflicts of interest.** The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

**Declaration of funding.** This research did not receive any specific funding.

### Author affiliations

<sup>A</sup>Alliance Against Antisemitism in Healthcare, Melbourne, Vic., Australia.

<sup>B</sup>Australasian Jewish Medical Federation, Melbourne, Vic., Australia.

<sup>C</sup>Department of Paediatrics, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Vic., Australia.

<sup>D</sup>Australian Academic Alliance Against Antisemitism, Australia.

<sup>E</sup>School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, Melbourne, Vic., Australia.