



MWIA TRAINING MODULE ON VIOLENCE

Violence Against Health Professionals

Definition

There are various forms of violence against health professionals, including violence perpetrated by a patient against a doctor or other health professional. This teaching module concentrates on violence against health professionals in three different situations:

1. In a war situation (e.g. terrorism, political unrest, etc.)
2. Cultural issues (e.g. vaccination programmes in Muslim countries, women doctors in Afghanistan)
3. Related to controversial issues such as abortion

General Information

- According to Jha and Ratnabali's *The Law on Armed Conflict*, "The most important principles in the 1864 Geneva Convention, which were retained in the text of subsequent Conventions, include the obligation to care for the wounded without distinction on the basis of nationality; the neutrality and inviolability of medical personnel and establishments; and the adoption of an emblem to distinguish and protect the latter."¹
- The Syrian American Medical Society reported, "In May 2016, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2286, condemning attacks against medical facilities and personnel in conflict situations. Yet following the adoption of this Resolution, the rate of attacks on healthcare increased by 89% to one every 29 hours. Since 2014 there have been 900 attacks in 20 countries with 1300 deaths, more than half of which occurred in Syria. There is always an accepted risk, but deliberately targeting medical workers and facilities is unacceptable."²
- Violence against polio workers increased in 2011 following revelations that a Pakistani surgeon had been sent by the CIA to seek information about Al Qaeda leader, Osama Bin Laden, under the guise of conducting a hepatitis immunisation survey - the attacks have continued intermittently ever since.³ Extremist groups have since resisted the vaccination programs, believing them to be a Western conspiracy against Islam, however with public education, resistance to vaccination is slowly declining.³ Moreover, the threat of foreign quarantines and travel restrictions has led to many prominent Pakistanis to endorse vaccination programs.³
- Women doctors are often targets of violence because they help other women who are victims of violence. This is discussed in greater detail in the Afghan Case Study and the fact sheet on 'Cultural Violence.
- Anti-abortion violence is violence committed against patients and staff of abortion facilities. Incidents of this violence have included destruction of property, kidnapping, stalking, assault, attempted murder, and murder, arson and bombings.⁴ Most documented incidents have occurred in the United States, although they have also occurred in many countries including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and Poland.⁵

Prevention of Violence Against Health Professionals

- UN Resolution 2286 demands respect for international law on the part of all parties to armed conflict and urges States to develop effective measures to prevent acts of violence.
- Much more needs to be done to enhance respect for the laws respecting health care and patients.
- Populations must be educated on the consequences of perpetrating acts of violence against health care.
- Humanitarian organisations need to come together and object in bilateral discussions and publicly to any political initiatives that undermine the neutrality of healthcare. Once the act of providing healthcare loses its neutrality or its impartiality through discrimination as to who is accepted for treatment and who is not, its protected status is compromised and it is vulnerable to attack.
- Ministers of Health of all countries have a responsibility and should be drivers of change. Pressure must be put on countries involved.

References

1. Jha, U. C. & Ratnabali, K. (2017). *The Law of Armed Conflict: An Introduction*. [eBook]. Retrieved from: <https://books.google.com/books?id=TxG7DgAAQBAJ>
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3. Constable, P. (11 January, 2014). *Politicians, Muslim scholars join vaccination effort as violence hinders Pakistan polio drive*. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>
4. Wilson, M. & Lynxwiler, J. (1988). Abortion clinic violence as terrorism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 11(4), 263-273. doi: 10.1080/10576108808435717
5. Anti-abortion violence. (n.d.). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved 14 August 2018 from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-abortion_violence.