

A zero tolerance policy for racism in the NHS

We welcome the statement made by Amanda Pritchard—the Chief Executive Officer of the National Health Service (NHS)—in the Healthcare Leaders Update bulletin on Oct 16, 2023,¹ and her perspective on the war that broke out on Oct 7, 2023, following the horrific terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel. Pritchard commented on the current war in the Middle East and on the human tragedy this represents. She noted that there must be no tolerance of outbreaks of racism (in which she includes both antisemitism and Islamophobia) and resultant abuse in the NHS at all times, including during the war. The NHS has to be, and be seen to be, a strongly supportive environment for all patients and staff.¹ We are, of course, devastated by the effects of Hamas' deadly actions on Israel's civilians and distressed by the ensuing harm to civilian lives in both Israel and Gaza. We believe her statement is a crucial beginning. Its implementation at every level throughout the NHS, and beyond, is now essential.

Many of our Jewish colleagues—doctors and other health-care professionals—have endured unacceptable and explicit antisemitism during the past week.² Although these attacks might have come from a small number of people, it is nonetheless a serious problem. Furthermore, our colleagues have been exposed to open support for the massacres done by Hamas: Dr Elwan, a neurology registrar, posted on social media mocking people fleeing a massacre by Hamas at a music festival.²

We hope Pritchard's statement will be widely distributed in the NHS and among all who are responsible for caring for patients and their families. Everyone involved needs to be aware that there is growing concern and fear among staff—general practitioners, consultants, junior doctors, nurses,

and other health-care professionals. Patients, and their families, need to feel safe in the knowledge that those entrusted with their care never express racist—including antisemitic—views.

Reports of racism in the UK have increased since Oct 7, 2023,³ and the NHS health-care environment needs to be immune against this. We need to remember that the attacks were launched by Hamas, which in the UK is a proscribed terrorist organisation, and open expressions of support for them are a crime.

We hope that the consequences of Pritchard's comments will be that the safety and security of all Jewish patients and Jewish health-care professionals will be assured throughout the UK's health-care facilities. This safety is a basic right. All staff need to be reminded of reporting pathways and available support if they are being intimidated, bullied, or harassed by colleagues in any shape or form. We hope for a speedy and safe resolution to this tragic crisis. In the UK, the Jewish Medical Association stands prepared to work with others to support the implementation of the principles outlined in Amanda Pritchard's statement.

DRK is a representative on the Board of Deputies of British Jews and serves on several subcommittees; represents the Jewish Medical Association on the General Medical Council's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity strategic board and on several interfaith and ethnic minority boards; is elected on behalf of medical academics to the British Medical Association's Forum for Racial Equality and Equity and Professional Regulatory Committees; was in the interfaith Medical Schools Council group; and in 2014, was part of an international team that inspected Israeli medical schools for their Council for Higher Education. FS is a member and former president of the Jewish Medical Association and current lead for professional affairs; has been a senior clinical advisor at NHS England since 2013; and is currently a part-time associate medical director in the Midlands, UK.

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- 1 NHS England. Healthcare leaders update. Oct 16, 2023. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/email-bulletins/healthcare-leaders-update/> (accessed Oct 18, 2023).
- 2 Jones E. NHS doctor faces calls to be suspended for 'sickening' post that mocked innocent Israeli festivalgoers fleeing Hamas gunmen. Mailonline, Oct 10, 2023. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-12614605/NHS-doctor-faces-calls-SUSPENDED-sickening-post-mocked-innocent-Israeli-festivalgoers-fleeing-Hamas-gunmen.html> (accessed Oct 18, 2023).
- 3 Community Security Trust. Antisemitic incidents increase by over 300%—update from CST. CST Blog, Oct 11, 2023. <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2023/10/11/antisemitic-incidents-increase-by-over-300-update-from-cst> (accessed Oct 18, 2023).



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