

# Doctor decries medical journal's politicization

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When psychiatrist Eddy Pakes read the stories and letters in the *Lancet* that slammed Israel, even going so far as to accuse it of war crimes, he was quite upset.

A medical journal is supposed to focus on scientifically based facts and research, not delve into areas of politics beyond its purview, he thought. But what to do about it?

About a month ago, Pakes joined a group of mostly American doctors for a five-day trip to Israel, where they were briefed on a number of issues related to medicine and hospital treatment in Israel, the better able to counter the misrepresentations in the *Lancet* articles.

Now he's back in Toronto and looking forward to briefing members of DARA, Doctors Against Racism and Antisemitism, about his trip and discussing ways to counter anti-Israel lies that have appeared in the *Lancet*.

"Doctors are frustrated," Pakes told *The CJN*. "How do we deal with this? There was a sense of impotence about this. That's why we went on the trip."

The trip was organized along with the Israel Medical Association, with programming arranged by Scholars for Peace in the Middle

East, CAMERA, Media-Central, NGO-Monitor and Magen David Adom, among others.

Supporters of Israel have been critical of a number of articles that have run in the *Lancet*, a British-based journal on medical issues, going back to 2007. DARA has highlighted several articles over the years which they say unfairly criticize Israel, misrepresent facts, are one-sided and ignore Palestinian suffering at the hands of Arab regimes and their own government.

An open letter in the July 23 issue of the *Lancet* prompted a push-back from those concerned over the politicization of a medical magazine.

In August, DARA sent its supporters an open letter and petition calling for the removal of Richard Horton as editor-in-chief of the journal.

"As scientists, researchers, and medical practitioners, we were shocked and astounded to read the 'Open letter for the people in Gaza.' The article, written by a group of highly biased individuals who falsely claimed to have no conflicts of interest, accused Israel of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The article is rife with political propaganda, is one-sided, and factually inaccurate. It is obvious that this highly biased commentary was not subject

to appropriate peer review let alone basic fact checking. This letter should therefore never have been published in the *Lancet*, a medical journal dedicated to intellectual honesty, impartiality, and equal treatment for all peoples."

They go on to accuse Horton of "a long and public history of anti-Israeli views and activism on behalf of various Palestinian causes" and of "the hijacking of a prestigious medical journal in advancement of a personal political agenda."

In October, Horton visited Israel, spending three days at Haifa's Rambam Medical Centre. He reportedly called his visit "a turning point for me and my relationship with this region,"

Subsequently, DARA wrote to its supporters saying, "It remains to be seen whether Dr. Horton's exposure to the positive reality of Israeli medicine will modify his apparent anti-Israeli position to the point that he will restore the *Lancet* to a credible medical journal; whether he will apply the standards of objectivity and open declaration of authors' conflicts in selecting articles for publication; whether he will be even-handed in publishing opinion pieces from both sides of the issue when it comes to health care as related to the Arab-Israeli conflict; whether



**Dr. Eddy Pakes** MOISHE FREMAR PHOTO

he will stop openly expressing his wish for the elimination of Israel as when he displayed on his personal Twitter page a map substituting Palestine for the State of Israel."

Pakes doesn't accept Horton's "half apology." He believes the *Lancet* has become politicized, and not in a good way.

The physicians on his recent trip to Israel visited the Ziv Medical Centre in Safed, where doctors treat Syrians wounded in that country's civil war. That's the sort of story that needs to get out, not one promoted in the *Lancet* in which Israelis are supposedly indiscriminately killing civilians, Pakes said.

As for the *Lancet*, he says the issue is "the inappropriate behaviour of a supposedly high level medical journal that's dealing with politics rather than with scientific facts." ■