

# MD group aims to combat misinformation

Written by Vanessa Santilli on November 17, 2009 for [The Medical Post](#)

Doctors against Racism and Anti-Semitism's first conference looked at the medical impact of terrorism

TORONTO | At the inaugural conference held by Doctors Against Racism and Anti-Semitism (DARA), the chairman of the group, Dr. Steve Samuel warned that articles have appeared even in top medical journals that, he claimed, were “not objective and unscientific with unverifiable data” particularly in relation to the Israeli and Palestinian conflict.

The group was created last March by anesthesiologists Drs. Robert Zadik and Michael Bloom to bring attention to racist and anti-Semitic incidents within the medical community.

## Impact of terrorism

The DARA conference, held at the University of Toronto in mid-October, focused on the medical and psychological impingement of terrorism. Various doctors shared their experiences on this topic with a crowd of approximately 200 people (about 150 of whom were MDs and the rest were dental or non-medical professionals).

“The issue of terrorism at the moment seems remote to Canadians, although we’ve had a few lucky misses,” he said. “So this program brought an academic focus to the experiences that others have had elsewhere in the world, including Pakistan and the Middle East.

“The aims of the conference were to educate people about the consequences—the medical and psychological impact of terrorism.”

## Treating psychiatrists

One of the issues discussed at the conference was the notion that even the psychiatrists who treat terror victims are affected. Dr. Samuel recounted one speaker describing situations where, after hearing numerous stories of acts of terror, psychiatrists became less empathetic toward their patients.

Currently, DARA has grown to more than 350 members.

“There is a lot of interest in making sure that medicine maintains its distance from political interference, manipulation and propaganda,” Dr. Samuel said.

During his closing remarks at the DARA conference, Dr. Samuel told the audience about the environment of “harassment, extremism and intimidation” he said he experienced on May 5 at the Medicine, War and Occupation presentation on the University of Toronto campus.

## Gaza mortality rates question

After hearing the speaker at a presentation on the health of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip tell the audience that the Israeli occupation had increased infant mortality rates among Palestinians, Dr. Samuel, a plastic surgeon and former chairman of the section on plastic surgery of the Ontario Medical Association, asked why she had falsified the numbers.

He said he then quoted UNICEF infant mortality statistics among Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank that indicated there had been an improvement in the health care of Palestinians there.

“After that, the room turned ugly,” Dr. Samuel said during his closing remarks at the conference. What

came next shocked him. “I was verbally assaulted from all corners, called ‘the stupidest man I have ever seen’ by a member of the audience while others started to chant, as if on cue, ‘You are a racist, racist, racist!’ . . . This was at my own alma mater.” This experience brought to mind what he’d read about ethnic extremism and left him shaken.

In March 2008, a group of University of Toronto academics and researchers, dominated by medical school faculty, expressed their opposition to a student-organized Israel Apartheid Week by running a full-page ad in the National Post newspaper. One year later, in March 2009, DARA was created in response to alleged anti-Israel bias in top medical journals. Dr. Samuel said the formation of DARA was not a result of Israel Apartheid Week.