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Israel-Gaza conflict

Call to dental colleagues

Sir, the UN has declared a humanitarian crisis in Gaza; we are deeply concerned about the loss of innocent lives, the catastrophic state of the health facilities and the continuing struggle of medical colleagues. Water, fuel and electricity supplies have been cut off – leaving surgeons with no option but to operate without anaesthesia, appropriate equipment or medication.¹

A British plastic surgeon, Professor Abu Sittah (London), who is working at Al-Shifa hospital, has vowed to remain treating the wounded until there is a ceasefire, risking his life daily to help others.² Incubators are no longer functioning, leaving premature babies huddled together on the ground, supported with tinfoil to keep warm.³

On 17 October 2023, the Al-Ahli Arab hospital was bombed, killing patients in their beds and destroying operating rooms whilst in use. This is a clear contravention of international humanitarian law.⁴ Article 19 of the Geneva Convention states all medical establishments shall be respected and protected by the Parties of the conflict.⁵

UNICEF, WHO and the UN population fund are urging for an immediate halt to attacks on healthcare facilities in Gaza.

Over 137 attacks on healthcare facilities have been recorded by WHO, leading to 521 deaths and 686 injuries, including the death of 16 healthcare workers.⁶

Newly graduated dentist Ahmed Al Hourani was killed, who had dreamt of setting up a dental treatment programme for the elderly.⁷ Suleiman Tarazi was another dentist killed with his family, whilst seeking refuge in a church.⁸

The British Medical Association, Royal College of Midwives and Royal College of Nursing have all released statements to condemn attacks on healthcare workers and their patients.^{9,10,11} Our profession has a moral duty to call for all parties involved in the conflict to abide by legal obligations under international humanitarian law. We urge our dental colleagues to join healthcare professionals worldwide, to support and protect hospitals, staff, patients, and civilians during this conflict.

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