



45. The diagnosis of public figures from the TV recliner and the media

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The American Psychiatric Association (APA) has stated its opposition to psychiatric diagnoses based on impressions of public political figures' appearances in the media and on social networks.

The first reason for this prohibition is related to professionalism in medicine. Professionalism in medicine requires a thorough psychiatric examination, professional discussion and a clear diagnosis. Reviewing performances on TV, tweets on Twitter and comments in the public, etc. does not accomplish that!

The second reason for the APA's determination is that such a mental health diagnosis leads to stigmatization of the mentally ill and damages the image of the profession and the patients in the field of psychiatry. Diagnosis from the "television recliner" as a political tool is an improper use of psychiatry, is not acceptable and is not professionally ethical.

The APA's 1973 ethical principle says that political issues and opinions must be separated from medical opinion. Moreover, it is forbidden to give a medical opinion to people who have not been professionally and reliably examined.

Superficial diagnosis upends the respect of the profession, the responsibility and the seriousness required in a doctor-patient relationship.

The American Psychiatric Association points out that in the USA the president is obliged to undergo periodic medical examinations. If an impairment is found that affects his functioning, he will receive an orderly and serious medical consultation aimed at persuading him to resign from his position.

In Israel, in 2007, we wrote a position paper on the topic of health transparency of national leaders. The position paper mainly referred to the role of the doctor treating the political personality and his obligation to maintain medical secrecy alongside his duty to the general public. That is why we recommended the establishment of a public body, to relay to citizens what they should know and express a position similar to that described in the USA.

In a discussion held at the Bureau of Ethics in June 2022, the members of the Bureau recommended adopting the approach of the American Psychiatric Association to all medical professions.

1. A doctor will not diagnose someone, including political and public figures, through the means of regular or social media, and will not publish such diagnoses publicly (as opposed to individual treatment through telemedicine).
2. A doctor will diagnose only after taking a medical anamnesis and performing a comprehensive and professional examination as is customary.



3. The doctor will not influence public opinion by taking advantage of his knowledge and status to pin a diagnosis on a candidate or an elected politician.
4. A doctor shall not take advantage of his professional or managerial position in order to influence his subordinates in the workplace, or his patients, to change their political opinion. See the position paper on doctors in the media - freedom of expression versus respect for the profession.