



34. The physician as a lobbyist in the Parliament and government offices in Israel

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The activity of lobbyists in the Parliament (Knesset) is regulated in Chapter 12 of the Law of the Knesset, 1994-5574.

According to the definition in the law, a lobbyist is "a person who, through occupation or for compensation, on behalf of a client, takes actions to convince a member of the Knesset regarding bills and secondary legislation in the Knesset or its committees, to the decisions of the Knesset and its committees, and to the appointment or election of a person to a position by the Knesset or by a body of which a Knesset representative is a member ". There are exceptions to this definition, such as those who take action on behalf of their employer as part of their work or those who perform certain positions in the civil service. It is recommended that every doctor read the law before appearing as a lobbyist - the law is the lower threshold, and ethics is the upper threshold.

The principles of this position paper are relevant for the aforementioned type of activity, both towards members of the Knesset and towards other government officials who make decisions, formulate policies, and the like.

The doctor may find himself in a conflict of interest between the interests of the body he seeks to represent before the Knesset and his duty to the professional truth and the principles of medical ethics, including doing good to patients, not causing harm, advocating just distribution of health resources in the country, and more.

Is it appropriate for a doctor to appear as a lobbyist?

There are those in Israel who claim that there is no place for such a practice. Quite a few doctors appear in the Knesset, before ministers and decision makers. Sometimes they are invited as representatives of various organizations (for example, as officials in the health system or as representatives of the IMA and its scientific associations), and other times they appear in the Knesset as lobbyists on various matters. Their appearance may be in their role as doctors for the purpose of promoting medical content, and sometimes by virtue of other activities that do not pertain to their occupation as physicians.

After discussing the issue, the members of the Ethics Bureau feel that it is not justified to restrict the steps of a doctor who wishes to act. At the same time, members feel that it is correct to determine and emphasize the special ethical duties of a doctor who represents a medical field or position before the authorities.



Therefore, the members of the Bureau determined as follows:

A. General:

1. Presenting the medical point of view to government institutions in Israel is a civil and moral obligation imposed on the doctor, by virtue of his being a professional in this field. The presentation of the medical position will be used to help members of the Knesset, government ministers and decision makers to establish rules that are compatible with the medical position.
2. A doctor should agree to act as a lobbyist only in a case where he believes that there is a solid foundation and scientific truth in the presentation of the medical opinion on the subject.
3. The presentation of the medical position shall be professional, reliable and impartial, based on scientific truth and accepted medical standards. A position must not be biased due to the expected benefit to the payer of the lobbyist.

B. Qualifications required of the doctor serving as a lobbyist:

1. On a medical issue, the physician-lobbyist shall have knowledge and experience relevant to the circumstances of the topic he wishes to present.
2. A doctor shall display humility, act carefully and responsibly and refrain from presenting a medical topic that is not in the field of his professional practice.
3. The physician lobbyist in a non-medical matter will act in a manner that respects himself, his fellow doctors and the medical profession. When his activity as a lobbyist does not involve medical issues, the doctor will not use his title or status as a physician to promote these goals.
4. A doctor who acts as an advocate on a non-medical topic shall exercise caution and avoid any conflict of interest with his practice of medicine.

C. Full disclosure:

1. A doctor presenting a position to decision makers and policy makers will clearly state his identification details, his training and professional and academic status at the beginning of his presentation.
2. The physician lobbyist will indicate whether he has or had a personal interest in the matter, on whose behalf he is presenting at the hearing, and whether he receives, will receive or has previously received compensation from a body with an interest in the matter. Also, the doctor will reveal any connection that may raise conflict of interest concerns, so that those present at the hearing will exercise discretion with regard to the content of his words.



D. Guidelines for the physician lobbyist:

1. The physician lobbyist will provide all the medical and scientific information concerning the case in question in an objective, fair and honest manner, will express his opinion on the subject, and if his opinion differs from the generally accepted opinion in the field, will also state the opinion of the majority in the medical world.
2. The physician lobbyist will rely on medical literature and will attach it or indicate references in a clear and correct manner, as is accepted.
3. The physician lobbyist will express his opinion in a matter-of-fact, modest and restrained manner. The physician may disagree with other medical opinions, but should not direct personal criticism at other medical experts. The discussion will be on the merits of the matter and not concerning individual colleagues.