



36. The exclusion of women in the healthcare system and medical services

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Background

Two women, a physician and a nurse, were recently excluded, in a demeaning fashion, from participating in an awards ceremony sponsored by the Ministry of Health and attended by the Deputy Minister of Health, in which awards were given for scientific papers in the field of medicine and Jewish law (halachah).

At the ceremony, held at the Shaare Zedek Medical Center, the two women, who were among the award recipients, were asked to sit in the gallery – not among the award-winning men – and not to go on stage to receive the award due to the attendance of rabbis at the event. The demand was presented to the physician and nurse at the site of the ceremony, several minutes before it began, and although they both felt uncomfortable with it, they acceded to the request.

Women's organizations, the Ethics Bureau of the Nurses' Union of Israel, and the president of Ben-Gurion University expressed their dismay over this incident to the Ethics Board of the Israeli Medical Association.

The Ethics Board also learned of a fertility and women's health convention, where female speakers, medical experts in their field, were asked to find male speakers to replace them. The members of the Ethics Board heard the award-winning physician who was not allowed to go on stage at the state ceremony, and discussed the spreading phenomena of the exclusion of women in the context of various incidents covered recently in the media.

The members of the Ethics Board are aware that we are dealing with a form of religious extremism that reflects a widespread and deep social process extending beyond the medical world. However, the members of the Board feel obligated to express a strong opinion against the exclusion of women in general, and particularly in the healthcare system, as presented in the following position paper.

The position paper:

- The exclusion of women is an unacceptable phenomenon that violates the value of equality and the values of democracy and therefore infringes on human dignity.
- The exclusion of women in the healthcare system can be expressed when receiving or providing medical services, in medical publications, at conferences, in the receipt of awards for professional achievements, or in the selection of positions in the healthcare system and more.
- Physicians should not condone any exclusion of women in the healthcare system,



including any act that creates discrimination, indignity or disrespect towards a woman, whether she is a patient or a physician.

- Physicians, including medical directors, should strive to set an example and to lead social action that contributes to equality between the sexes and should abstain from recognizing or accepting, through action or inaction, measures that contradict that principle.
- Physicians should not attend any medical or scientific event where there is exclusion of women, whether patients or physicians.