



62. The prohibition of workplace harassment

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Background

Two senior physicians presented their personal story to the Ethics Board: A new director, who was appointed to the department where they had worked for many years, began preventing them from performing surgeries. They felt disgraced and humiliated and suffered significant damage to their professional abilities in the operating room. This harms not only them personally, but also the patients they could treat in the future.

The issue of workplace harassment made the headlines in mid-2015, following proposed legislation that would enable compensation without proof of damage in cases of harassment. The explanation of the bill states: "Harassment in the workplace is a common social phenomenon that harms many workers: Studies show that at least one of every four workers in Israel suffers from workplace harassment at some point in his or her career. Workplace harassment infringes upon workers' human dignity, liberty, well-being, their ability to perform their work and their professional performance. There are cases where the harassment even harms an individual's physical or mental health."

Workplace harassment has been defined as recurrent behavior against an individual that creates a hostile, demeaning and humiliating environment, to the point that hurts his or her ability to work. The proposed legislation suggested compelling employers to take reasonable measures to prevent such harassment. These measures included creating regulations to prevent harassment and a procedure for filing complaints about workplace harassment, as well as handling complaints and acting to resolve the issue and prevent it from recurring.

Examples of harassment include, as stated above, demeaning or humiliating behavior, screaming, shouting, false accusations, spreading harmful rumors, infringing on privacy, setting unreasonable demands or demands that aren't relevant to the job, intimidation or threats, crediting a worker's successes to another person and disrupting a worker's ability to perform his or her job.

In the IMA's code of ethics, we have emphasized the responsibility of physician managers, both towards patients and subordinates. This responsibility includes respecting the ethical and professional autonomy of subordinate physicians and helping to improve their professional level.

Regarding professional medical development, the managing physician is committed first and foremost – like any other physician – to the patients' best interests. This commitment is expressed also in training physicians to adeptly perform all medical treatments that will improve the patients' medical conditions as much as possible.

The obligation of physicians to impart medical knowledge derives from the Hippocratic



Oath. In this framework, managing physicians are required to ensure the training of their subordinate physicians, interns and senior physicians, and to continuously learn from colleagues who have special expertise.

The Ethics Board has decided to raise awareness of a managing physician's special obligations, derived from medical ethics, with an emphasis on preventing workplace harassment between physicians.

Position paper

- Workplace harassment is forbidden, harms the dignity of physicians and impairs their performance.
- Managing physicians, like any other physician, should refrain from demeaning or humiliating another physician in any way, including their manner of expression about or towards that physician.
- Managing physicians should ensure that subordinate physicians can perform their work and that their medical training, medical abilities and professional level are not harmed, without creating an atmosphere of intimidation and while setting a personal, moral and professional example.
- Physicians should refrain from joining in harassing behavior towards another physician and should do their utmost to support the victim.
- Physicians who identify behavior that could be interpreted as harassment should make every effort to inform the harasser that such behavior is wrong.
- Physicians who identify harassment of another physician, should try to involve the harasser's superiors.
- Physicians who identify or undergo harassment are urged to contact the Ethics Board, which will thoroughly examine the issue.
- The Ethics Board and IMA are committed to protecting physicians, supporting colleagues and helping to prevent further harassment.