

Australia: Doctors demand medical colleges and indemnity agencies defend pro-Palestine health workers

Richard Phillips
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Rank-and-file doctors in Australia have stepped up their calls for medical colleges and indemnity insurance providers to defend local colleagues targeted by Zionist elements determined to silence all opposition to Israel's imperialist-backed mass murder of Palestinians in Gaza.

Beginning in late 2023, Australian medical practitioners protesting Israel's war crimes have been subjected to a barrage of online harassment, doxing and threats. The Albanese Labor government and its state counterparts, who have unwaveringly backed Israel, have aided and abetted these attacks.

According to one media report, an estimated 60 health workers were falsely accused of antisemitism and reported to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) between October 2023 and April 2024. Thirty-nine of those named were formally investigated by the regulatory body.

While the health regulator has not deregistered any doctors thus far, it refuses to publish any figures on the number of false allegations of antisemitism against medical practitioners it has received. Nor has it released any details on the outcome of its "investigations" into those targeted.

Health workers reported to AHPRA face a prolonged and stressful review process—in some instances stretching over 12 months or more—with their careers hanging in the balance. Although those investigated by AHPRA are banned from publicly speaking about the procedures, those making the complaints can act anonymously, without fear of exposure or penalty if their claims are false and vexatious.

The Australian Medical Association (AMA), the health unions, and medical colleges have turned a blind eye to all this, refusing to publicly condemn the Zionist witch-hunting. As a Melbourne doctor told the *Guardian* last week, medical practitioners had been "quietly struggling" against the "covert silencing of people who speak out against violence or criticise Israel" since October 2023.

After two years of calls from its members, the Royal Australasian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) finally wrote to AHPRA last month, raising a series of timid concerns about the intimidation of its members.

This year, the Murdoch media has stepped up its harassment of health workers and other prominent figures—academics, artists, writers, musicians—publicly opposing the Gaza genocide.

Some of the health workers targeted include Dr Miranda Robinson, a Melbourne obstetrician, and Dr Jennifer Martinez, a highly experienced

GP and forensic medical examiner who previously worked for Headspace, the national mental health organisation.

Early this year, Sky News published bogus allegations made by a pro-Zionist health worker against Robinson, impacting her mental health, income and career. The harassment against the obstetrician was so serious that she initiated legal action against her complainant.

Last month, Sky News targeted Martinez, who became head of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital's sexual assault service in Sydney in February this year. The article cited an anonymous letter to the New South Wales health minister, claiming Martinez was "antisemitic" and guilty of "bullying behaviour."

The letter and article urged the health minister to investigate and "reconsider" Martinez's appointment, claiming that her conduct posed "significant moral and legal risks to survivor safety." It was a clear attempt to destroy Martinez's career.

Bernadette Zaydan, a lawyer who defended some of the victimised health workers, told the *World Socialist Web Site* last month that she was in contact with Martinez and would provide legal assistance if required.

"There is a clear and growing pattern of Zionist-led political campaigns using both the media and regulators to silence free speech and pressure workplaces—particularly major hospitals—to take adverse action against healthcare workers who speak out against Israel's genocide and its policy of murdering or abducting healthcare workers and obliterating hospitals in breach of international law," Zaydan said.

"We have seen confidential information and defamatory statements about healthcare workers deliberately fed to the media. Lawyers are working hard to ensure those who fight back achieve justice in court.

"We would prefer compliance with the law rather than forcing healthcare workers into a position of having to fight for their livelihood and reputation in the courts," she said.

With mass opposition to the Gaza genocide now at unprecedented levels—shown in the Sydney Harbour Bridge protest and other huge demonstrations across Australia and internationally during the past month—doctors have made clear that they are not intimidated by Zionist lies and are determined to fight back.

This is reflected in a recent open letter sent to the RACGP's Paediatrics

and Child Health Division and endorsed by 13 percent of the college's 5,400-strong membership. Four hundred surgeons have signed a similar letter to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

The letters demand that the colleges publicly condemn Israel's ongoing ethnic cleansing operation in Gaza, voice their solidarity with Palestinian healthcare workers, call for diplomatic and economic sanctions against Israel and defend fellow workers subjected to Zionist doxxing and the associated weaponisation of AHPRA.

Growing numbers of doctors are also suspicious about the sudden resignation on August 11 of Dr Stephen Parnis as chairman of the Medical Insurance Group of Australia (MIGA), which provides insurance and advocates for health workers, including in unfair dismissal cases and disciplinary actions.

Although Parnis, a former AMA vice president, will remain on MIGA's board, many believe that he was forced out because of his long-standing opposition to Israel's onslaught on Gaza.

Over sixty doctors have sent letters to MIGA, calling for Parnis to be reinstated as chair, and for the medical indemnity group—which has over 30,000 members—to affirm its commitment to protecting members opposing the Gaza genocide.

Writing last month in *Croakey*, the online medical news outlet, Dr Safiyyah Abbas highlighted the targeted assassinations of hundreds of health workers and journalists in Gaza and said Australian doctors had a professional and ethical duty to oppose the genocide.

The Australian-based paediatric rehabilitation physician pointed out that Zionist intimidation of health workers is global and cited the career-destroying victimisations of Professor Rupa Marya from the University of California, Dr Yipeng Ge at the University of Ottawa and Dr Nadeem Crowe from the Royal Free Hospital in London.

Abbas said doctors in Australia were increasingly frustrated with the response of their medical colleges, “whose silence constitutes institutional complicity and normalisation of double standards... This begets further silence in the profession and sets a dangerous precedent of violating international humanitarian law, including medical neutrality, with impunity.

“Despite repeated calls to act, the Australian Medical Association has failed to advocate beyond acting as a messenger passing on World Medical Association statements, which selectively condemn Hamas' war crimes but not Israel's, and espouse weak affirmations of medical neutrality that ignore Israel's blatant violations.

“The life and death urgency to stop Israel's campaign of extermination of Palestinians, juxtaposed with political leaders' continued support for Israel, empty words of concern for Palestine, and tokenistic actions, is beyond hypocritical,” she said. Abbas demanded that MIGA and other medical indemnity companies “urgently clarify” whether they will protect doctors who speak up for Palestine and criticise Israel, Australia, or any other country.

Late last week, in another example of the continuing attack on the democratic rights of health workers, Australian Salaried Medical Officers Federation (ASMOF) members in New South Wales revealed that the state Labor government is planning to impose a repressive new social media policy on all NSW health workers. The policy is designed to stop health workers from speaking out—not just against the Gaza genocide but

voicing their concerns over state government attacks on public health.

The final draft of the social media policy document says staff must not “engage in any activity that may adversely affect... public trust in their employing agency”—i.e., the government. This would apply not just to social media and other discussion platforms, but also to private communication programs such as WhatsApp and Microsoft Teams. The catch-all directive sets up the conditions for the victimisation of health workers accused of violating the policy.

While ASMOF notes the repressive nature of the state Labor government's planned policy, the record shows that all the unions and associations covering health workers have systematically opposed any mobilisation of their members to fight Labor's attacks on freedom of speech or the ongoing Zionist victimisations of those denouncing Israel's war crimes.

In 2024, two young members of the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Federation at Bankstown Hospital were provoked by a former Israeli soldier and social media “influencer” into making reactionary statements about “killing” Israeli patients. In response, the union immediately called a rally in central Sydney to furiously denounce the nurses, actively aligning with the ensuing pile on by Labor and the corporate media.

Notwithstanding the determination of doctors and health workers in Australia to oppose Israel's war crimes and defend their colleagues in Gaza, they must draw sharp political lessons from their experiences since October 2023.

What is needed is not more appeals to the organisations that have divided and isolated health workers but a working-class industrial and political offensive against the Albanese government and its unwavering support—including the supply of F-35 parts and intelligence data from Pine Gap—for Israel's mass murder in Gaza.

The struggle against the Gaza genocide, the greatest war crime of the 21st century, requires a new perspective and the independent mobilisation of workers globally on a socialist and internationalist program.

Health workers must form new organisations of struggle, independent rank-and-file committees linking them to workers nationally and internationally based on an understanding that fight against the mass murder in Gaza is inseparable from the struggle to put an end to the capitalist profit system—the source of the genocide and ever-increasing danger of a third imperialist war.

We urge health workers to contact the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which will maintain your anonymity, discuss your current conditions and our analysis, and how to develop an independent rank-and-file committee at your workplace.

Contact the Health Workers' Rank-and-File Committee (HWRFC):

Email: sephw.aus@gmail.com

Twitter: [@HealthRandF_Aus](https://twitter.com/HealthRandF_Aus)

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/hwrfaus



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact