

## Bringing closure: towards achieving a better understanding of Israel

We wholeheartedly endorse Richard Horton's timely Comment,<sup>1</sup> in which he addresses the global rise of anti-Semitism particularly evident in Europe and the USA. Horton stresses the need to educate medical students and health-care professionals of the evil and disastrous consequences of ignoring the historical reality of the Holocaust. It will remind the world, 75 years on, that the call *Never Again* remains highly relevant!

We share Horton's concern that to both ignore and intellectually disengage from the horrors of the Holocaust contributes to anti-Semitism. We fully embrace his Comment<sup>1</sup> as it reflects the thrust of our original strong criticism<sup>2</sup> 5 years ago of *The Lancet* publishing the Correspondence by Paola Manduca and colleagues.<sup>3</sup> We felt this Correspondence was a clear manifestation of anti-Semitism, disguised as destructive and inappropriate distortion of Israel's survival conflicts. We believe it should never have been published, let alone in *The Lancet*.

Manduca and colleagues' Correspondence<sup>3</sup> was considered by many as profoundly anti-Semitic and anti-Israel, demonising the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) during the last Gaza conflict.<sup>4</sup> The publication of the letter caused major offence to many medical professionals who elected to impose sanctions, by a variety of means, on *The Lancet* and other Elsevier publications in view of the Editor's refusal to retract the letter.<sup>2</sup> These sanctions included avoidance of submitting research articles and refusal to peer review other researchers' manuscripts submitted to *The Lancet* or to other Elsevier journals.

Now, 5 years on, this has been an effective solidarity exercise, demonstrating the ability of an intellectually diverse global community to bond

and send a very strong moral message to the publisher. This brings us back to Horton's statesman-like Comment,<sup>1</sup> which we applaud. It has the potential to serve as an important turning point and to bring closure to the stand of more than 4000 clinical and basic medical scientists and health professionals who withdrew their previously strong support for *The Lancet* and other Elsevier journals until this unfair bias against Israel was repaired.

We now feel that our original criticism and our actions have had an important and positive outcome. It has served to establish a better understanding and closer relationship between existential reality in Israel and the Editor, who previously appeared only to focus on Palestinian causes. Horton now better understands the realities on the ground in Israel and recognizes the excellent health-care system in Israel that provides full medical care to the Arab and Jewish population equally. Moreover, the medical-ethical principles in Israel that Horton so rightly mentions in his Comment<sup>1</sup> are well reflected in, for example, the IDF Medical Units and Israeli health services that have silently provided medical care to thousands of wounded Syrians afflicted by the genocidal Syrian war.

So, representing the people who signed the petition<sup>2</sup> 5 years ago, we would speculate that there is a season for everything, and it is now time to move forward, sanctions over, with a spirit of unity.

We declare no competing interests.

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1 Horton R. Offline: Medicine and the Holocaust—it's time to teach. *Lancet* 2019; **394**: 105.

2 Drucker D. A call to action to institute guidelines governing ethical publishing of science and medicine free of divisive political opinion. Change the corporate behavior of Elsevier! <https://www.change.org/p/erik-engstrom-ceo-reed-elsevier-plc-a-call-to-action-to-institute-guidelines-governing-ethical-publishing-of-science-and-medicine-free-of-divisive-political-opinion-change-the-corporate-behavior-of-elsevier> (accessed July 26, 2019).

3 Manduca P, Chalmers I, Summerfield D, Gilbert M, Ang S. An open letter for the people in Gaza. *Lancet* 2014; **384**: 397–98.

4 Ahmed Q, Avidan AY, Ciechanover A, et al. Israel–Gaza conflict. *Lancet* 2014; **384**: e34–37.