



e.Forum Posit

POSIT: Physicians and Torture

Three posits focus on the physician's role in interrogations and possible torture.

The current topic generated a wide-ranging discussion by the SSVMS Editorial Committee, and the upshot was a "Triple Posit":

- 1) **"It is morally and ethically justified for a physician to assist in obtaining information from a well documented terrorist, even if that can involve torture, injury, or unintended death."**
- 2) **"It is morally and ethically justified for a physician to assist in obtaining information from a suspected terrorist, even if that can involve torture, injury, or unintended death."**
- 3) **"Physicians should never cooperate with or tacitly condone the use of torture by anyone."**

There were more than 150 responses, with commentary from 45 members.

Posits are necessarily strident or extreme statements, intended to promote discussion. Posits are not polls, nor do they necessarily reflect the views of SSV Medicine, the Medical Society or Board of Directors.

"I could not click on any of your options but I strongly favor option 3) War is hell and there are always casualties that can't be avoided and compromising our morals in the long run will cost us dearly." - Bill Blaisdale, MD

"We have seen the catastrophe created in Iraq by the current administration's permissive attitudes towards torture. It is critical that military physicians maintain an absolute ethical opposition to abuses of prisoners and report such occurrences if they become aware of them. There appears to be no end to the abuses of human beings justified by political leaders as fighting terrorism or some other perceived evil. The medical profession should oppose such rationalizations whenever they occur." - John J. McCarthy

"Physicians, in my opinion must bear the burden of the dirty work in fighting terror. No hall-passes, no lame claims to higher moral ground relieves doctors from the tasks that are called for to gain the intelligence that helps to hunt down, and to kill terrorists. We will remain different and vastly better humans than they are just in asking the question.

My opinion is that events are imposed upon us that compel us to abandon concern for a terrorist's rights to life. We are right to match their indifference and to inflict pain and suffering upon them until they are vanquished. They deserve the wrath they have incited ; Terrorist are deadly enemies who have always used torture and murder freely as settled policy. I have no trouble with physicians as a matter of policy supporting whatever it takes to participate in destroying these individuals.

I've read but don't believe that torture is counterproductive. I think stepping up to terrible tasks such as torture is no more onerous than the atomic warfare we were forced to use in

protecting our cultural right to safe living years ago.

Anytime I find myself preferring to duck this issue I know I am hiding behind the mantle of the ethics befitting a more ideal era of my professional life. My worry over being thought of as a Dr Mengela pales when I think of the people jumping hand in hand from the Towers in dread of being burned alive in deaths that were planned for them and continue to be planned for us by these utterly worthless scum. Daily outrages make my response to this question in fact rather easy, and I'm glad you asked." - Ben Kaufman, MD

"For a physician to participate in torture is an abomination, a horrific perversion from the principles of holding the patient's good uppermost. Abandoning that principle might be tempting in some scenarios--many lives at stake, known crimes performed by the individual, etc. But it is just when a principle is hard to uphold that it is most vitally important that we do so." - Janet O'Brien, MD

"Physicians have but one duty, the health and welfare of the individual in their care. Physician must never forsake that duty for what they might consider "the common good," for perceived religious reasons, for perceived ethnic reasons, for any reason whatever." - Dennis Sullivan

"Physicians should never participate in enhancing torture even for a "good purpose"."
- Robert Treat, MD

"Physical torture will cause people to say anything to stop the pain. Sleep deprivation, withholding of privileges or needs that do not harm their health or even psychological pressure can be productive (although I have no experience). I believe the use of medications, if they actually exist, that remove the barriers to telling the truth would not be immoral. Long prison sentences or holding known terrorists (or those strongly suspected of being terrorists) for long periods of time deprives them of life and liberty it totally justified. We have released "campers" from Guantanamo because they were not thought to be dangerous only to find them killed on the battlefield or re-captured. We have a lot of the right guys but we don't have them all." - Michael Maddox, MD

"As a medical provider I feel my purpose is to provide the necessary " medical" care without regard to the social status of my patient, or if (I) cannot then to refer them out appropriately. Certainly the condoning of torture is totally against any tenet of medicine."
- Shereen Zakauddin, MD

"Though I believe that coercion (which can include a certain amount of physical or psychological deprivation or exposure) is certainly justified, overt torture (infliction of significant bodily harm) is unethical. For a physician to participate in the torture of a suspect would involve a perversion of the art of medicine, and a violation of the prime dictate of medicine: "primum non nocere"--"first do no harm". A physician could assist with use of anesthetic agents to induce semi-consciousness so a suspect would be more amenable to cooperation; a physician could assist with subterfuge or otherwise tricking a suspect; and a physician could act as a consultant regarding methods of deprivation that, while doing no true harm to the patient, would coerce him/her into cooperating." - John Gisla, MD

(agreeing with first posit) "Terrorist cells operate outside the bounds of normal human culture and require extreme measures to control them." - Ron Rogers, MD

(#1 agree, #3 disagree, #2 no opinion.) "While I may defend the principle of extracting information from a terrorist by any means necessary, I don't think I could personally be involved." - William Lewis, MD

"I absolutely feel it is never appropriate for a physician to condone or participate in torture." - Lawrence Wong, MD

"It is a physicians duty to perform functions of a physician and not get involved with functions better left to professional interrogators. It would however be appropriate for physicians to try to obtain information as long as it did not involve torture, injury or

potential of unintended death. We should all still be upholding the principle of "first of all do no harm", even if we are confronted with a terrorist." - Edward Mansour, MD

"If the medical profession won't stand up for compassion and humaneness who will?? This does not mean that terrorists should not be held accountable for their action, but we really shouldn't use their methods." - Thomas Atkins, MD

"One of the worst stories from WW 2 concerned those MDs in the 3rd Riech who aided in the torture of prisoners. It was an unbelievable act by a few physicians."
- Byron Demorest, MD

"Stopping terrorism will save lives in the future, and getting information from terrorists is to save other lives. Terrorists should be destroyed in any case, since there is no room for violence in our society." - R Shah, MD

"This is part of the general philosophical question of whether or not is acceptable to perpetrate evil in order to prevent evil. If you agree with this, it becomes very difficult to tell who is evil and who is good. If being good versus being evil doesn't matter to you, then it is a moot question, and has in fact already been answered." - Matthew L.Vanderveen, MD

"Information obtained from torture is unreliable. If a physician participates in torture, that physician jeopardizes the protected status of medical personnel. Aggressors will not usually attack hospitals knowing that action invites retaliation against their medical facilities. Additionally, if they are captured, they may be treated (at) those medical facilities."
- Creighton Chin, MD

"I thought that the infamous "medical experiments" of the Nazis and the obvious unethical participation by some Nazi doctors answered these questions for all time. I actually believe that the only ethical statement would be this:
"No person should ever cooperate with or condone the use of torture!"
- Alfred Czerwinski, MD

"Torture. NEVER! And SHAME on OUR government! John Williams, MD

"Physician take an oath to cause no harm. It is never morally or ethically justified to participate in torture. However, we are morally and ethically bound to treat people who have been tortured. In addition, we are obligated to report such abuses to those in command. Physicians should also be consulted to render opinions on interrogation techniques. this would allow for intervention before an interrogation becomes torture. Although this is a bit of a thin line, physicians should only evaluate the techniques, not devise the techniques." - Robert Jacoby, MD

"It is morally and ethically justified for a physician to assist in obtaining information from a well documented or suspected terrorist if it does not involve torture, injury, or significant risk of death."

Could the carefully controlled and monitored use of drugs or other painless, nonlethal techniques, under the same circumstances as "routine" anesthesia, be accepted in order gather information necessary for protecting innocent lives?

Torturing, injuring, or killing prisoners or suspects is not acceptable, but failing to protect the lives of terrorists' intended victims is also unacceptable." - Lee Welter, MD

"The very idea that a physician would be involved in torture sends chills down my spine. There is NO situation where this is appropriate." - Bette Hinton, MD

"These issues cannot be answered simply with a "yes" or "no" answer. Religious fanaticism and associated "terrorist acts" must be addressed by whatever means necessary to prevent these acts." - Gene Speicher, MD

"Your questions are too ambiguous to answer. A better question would be "if assisting in the interrogation of any person would prevent death and suffering is it ethically justified?" The way your questions are worded you are 1. discriminating against terrorists 2. Not including the results of said interrogation. So the correct answer is...this is a bad question and needs to be rewritten. Sorry,." - William Fenton, MD

"The world is gradually becoming increasingly violent. As physicians we must do everything in our power to counteract this trend." - Bill Peniston, MD

"Is this a joke? Can you have possibly forgotten the atrocities committed by physicians in the Nazi concentration camps using similar words as justification? Anyone who answers yes to #'s 1 and 2 should have their license revoked -- PERIOD!" - Daniel Egerter, MD

"Anyone that has been tortured seems to agree that torture only results in the victim giving up anything they think their captor wants to hear. The quality of the information does not usually warrant the results. There are plenty of sadistic people around to provide support for torture that would preempt the need for the medical profession to condone or support torture. This is not a medical procedure nor is it in the scope of any concept of medical practice." - Richard Gould, MD

(On disagreeing with all three posits) "Physician cooperation will depend on circumstances and the final definitions or scope of "torture" and "injury". There must be circumstances where physician's cooperation becomes morally and ethically justified." - E.L. Bingham, MD

"Physicians are trained to comfort and heal. They act with the consent of the patients except in emergency situations." - James Farley, MD

"It can be argued that by assisting in the acquisition of information, one may be preventing harm to a large portion of the society. So in this sense, one might justify suspension of the "first, do no harm" edict. However, at some level, all actions may have consequences that ultimately increase or decrease the amount of harm to other individuals. For example, with the amount of equipment "waste" produced in the hospital, we could easily feed and manage a number of other impoverished and/or underserved persons in the community. There is a point at which this justification can no longer be held because there are just too many degrees of separation. Where this point lies differs from person to person, and herein lies the ethical dilemma. I would argue that very seldom are we able to accurately predict the future. It is unclear whether or not torturing a terrorist -- real or suspected -- will ultimately lead us to preventing death to many of our citizens. But the fact remains that the consequences of intentionally inflicting harm upon another person will lead to pain and perhaps death (since these are the end points of the activity). Given this information, it is impossible to justify calling oneself a physician while engaging in this activity, since it is not clear that torture ultimately leads to anything except pain and death." - Paul Park, MD

"I'M APPALLED IT IS EVEN BEING ASKED." - Nancy Gilbert, MD

"Some may be tempted to participate in pseudo-patriotism and tarnish the profession by trampling the Hippocratic Oath "Do NO Harm!" This authoritarian mentality will displace the humanitarian resolve that has given our profession the trust that is at the core of health and healing. Physicians torturing was only done in Nazi Germany! At any time, it is easy to justify the loss of one's own moral compass when convinced that another soul is no longer human. This happened easily to many ethnic and social groups in the past by placing labels that connote "non-human" to the ruling government. Examples are labeling of the "Jews", "Slaves", "Fags", "Communists", and now "Terrorists". Let us not repeat the past mistakes!" - Franklin Long, MD

A true ("well-documented") or self-declared terrorist is just that; a TERRORIST who hopes by terror and fear to obtain their goal of world domination and who is sworn to kill, and is hoping to kill, as many infidels (that is non-muslim individuals or even innocent fellow-muslim or non-muslim individuals) who may in any way oppose (or innocently obstruct) their ambitions to advance their stated aim of dominating the entire earth and

governing it by a muslim authoritarian regime of the same philosophy and "world-view" as their extreme sect of muslim belief. They vow to establish their "brand of" Islam as the ONLY religion allowed by those who are subjugated by their militant religion. There are very many recorded incidents in which this very aggressive intolerant sect terrorized and killed anyone who opposes (or innocently "stands in-the-way-of") their ambitions. They historically "spread peace by the sword" and they "compassionately" offer the conquered the one time offer to convert to their "brand of" Islam or to be killed

The MURDER of about 3,000 innocent persons by the destruction of the New York twin towers and other individuals in the Pentagon and in another hi-jacked passenger air craft is an example of their ambitions put into action using available technology and is typical of what we may continue to expect. (Consider further their recent terrorist actions in Spain and in Britain as a continuation of their ambitious plans). They would rejoice if they could kill and injure millions or all of the non-muslims (or innocent muslims) not subscribing to their own "brand of" Islam or disable our non-muslim (and innocent muslim) governments, commerce, communications or any of our harmoniously functioning non-muslim society so that they can obtain control of the entire world and rule it in the manner of what the modern Taliban did in the muslim countries of which they had control. Example: Afganistan. They did not hesitate publicly to beat or execute those who they suspected of, or who had actually dared, not to completely follow their rules. They hope to re-establish their "Islamic" government with its complete control of all of their society in their current lands (and in any other lands which they hope to control). However, although they want to return to their world of the early centuries following Mohammed, they are as intellectually capable as any other humans and will not hesitate to utilize any of the technology that exists as long as they control the population with laws or rules dating back to well before the past twelve to thirteen centuries.

I completed 51 missions as a B-24 bomber pilot and crew commander opposing the Nazi regime in WWII while we were fighting the government and military of Japan on another front. We were rudely awakened in the latter part of a depression, but we, as a nation, soon were completely mobilized for our survival and the survival of our way of life and ideals. We knew who our enemies were geographically and what uniforms they wore (with the exception of a very few undercover spies). Some Nazi spies, not in enemy uniforms were captured tried and some were executed. One such spy reportedly took the identity of an American draftee and while living in the guise of a ground crewman placed explosives set to explode at a given altitude and destroy the aircraft and crew. He managed to do this several times and was well- paid for his efforts until he was "found out" and was then executed in a very short time. And this occurred during the time in which I flew from a neighboring air base. Now we know that the "Islamic" TERRORISTS are very widely dispersed throughout the world and they appear ethnically as others within their varied home-lands. They are not all "Middle Eastern or Arabic" in appearance. They hope, in fact, to recruit other ethnic groups such as nordic-appearing individuals (we should remember an American citizen recruit who made the news after being captured in a battle in Afghanistan) and one may also speculate as to the motivation of individuals such as Timothy McVey (and associate) in the government building bombing in Oklahoma as well as a growing list of non-middle-eastern appearing individuals who are united with the "Islamic Fascist" cause and movement.

We need to "wake up" and be alerted as to the danger to which we are subject (in addition to the degeneration of our "popular-culture" which contributes to our interior deterioration and which the Islamic Fascists are pleased to claim is evidence of our evil degeneracy). I fear that the enemy we face now is more formidable in many ways than those we faced in WWII. Too many of the "western culture" are asleep regarding the extent and severity of the danger and the enemy can easily hide within our own lands. The "hi-jackers" of 9-11-01 existed unnoticed within our USA and perfected their flying skills for their murderous mission undetected within our slumbering society. They are eagerly and diligently perfecting other modern techniques with which to subdue us all. They hope to have atomic bombs or dirty bombs (consider Iran's plans). Can we doubt that they would use biologic agents to accomplish their goals?

I would gladly do anything I could to change the thinking of a terrorist, if I had the opportunity. I would rather have the terrorist individual as a friend, devoid of his murderous ideology, but, when someone is overtly trying to murder my family, or my neighbors, or me, I will oppose them as strongly as I can, alone or with help.

These terrorists do not wear uniforms or even carry the buttons from their uniforms (as did my friends who were shot down and imprisoned in WWII) and they try to hide within our midst posing as humble citizens. They can not, therefore, expect to be treated as legitimate prisoners of war. The rules of the Geneva Convention do not in any way apply to aid them. They may have information that, if we knew of it, would save the lives of our families, friends, individuals with whom I might disagree politically, religiously, or on foreign policy. That information should be obtained if at all possible!! They would have gladly beheaded you, me, or our friends, family (or people among us with whom I might disagree but who they consider an enemy) if given a chance to do so. And they would prefer to do so on tape that can be shown on TV!!! (They have done this beheading on live tape/TV previously)!!! Their imprisonment in "Gitmo" assures them of three good meals a day, good medical care, exercise and their Quranto read and prayer beads to handle while the worship Allah as they desire (while still imprisoned). They deserve none of this care but we do not deserve to behave as they, the enemy, would!! We should obtain any information we can from them as humanely as possible. But, if they have information and we can obtain it, short of the gross lowering of ourselves to their moral level, we should obtain it!! Perhaps, with God's help, I may be able to love my enemy as a fellow human being, but in no way should I love or condone what he has done or would do if he is given the opportunity. I would prefer to treat even my enemy with loving concern, but in no way should I "enable" him, and if he possesses information which, if we knew of it, would save lives. I feel we probably should spare his life in interrogation even though he does not deserve it! However, we should use techniques that are unpleasant to him, and emotionally, and possibly significantly physically painful to him. But we should never lower ourselves to the level of the Doctors of Medicine who experimented on prisoners in Nazi Germany or prisoners of Imperial Japan, the prisoners of the North Vietnamese, or treatment of our fellow human beings as the fanatical Islamic fascists currently treat their captives.

They deserve to be executed! In opposing an armed terrorist I would not hesitate to shoot to kill him, if I could not capture him, and thus I would protect the innocent and/or save my own life! It somehow seems different to assist in torture of a captured terrorist no matter how undeserving he is of any compassion! The administration of drugs that might cause him to talk and reveal vital facts to protect us all seems to me to be something I might (if I were a practicing capable physician) feel moral to do. I do believe in the death penalty in some rare cases, but I would prefer in many cases to imprison one indefinitely, or for life, in the hope that they might change. For example "the son of Sam" multiple murderer changed and by all reports is a devout Christian at this time while not expecting his new life to gain him freedom in this lifetime. And as a lifetime prisoner, his change has caused others, including former guards, to change and choose Christianity and its resultant beliefs and improved life-style changes!! So, he is changed and is a positive force for good now regardless of how fully evil he was in the past. (I agree he should never be released from prison no matter how fully changed he seems to be while imprisoned.)

Perhaps the life of the terrorist may be better protected with a medical professional present during his interrogation, especially if fully justified "unpleasant" stressful, psychological, emotional or physical measures are justly being used to obtain information. The terrorist does not deserve this protection or limitation of interrogation. However, I do not feel that as a medical doctor I should inflict torture on a fellow human being within my care, no matter how undeserving that person may be. Nevertheless, I believe that if he were not imprisoned, and I could not subdue him, I would be duty-bound to try to kill him while defending others (or myself) from what he would hopefully and "prayerfully" wish to do to us and all those who do not believe as he believes. (It seems that he is the one that is being intolerant)! In such a confrontation with him, I feel my higher duty is to defend others and myself with all of my ability, even though it may, in his belief, put him

in the presence of what he believes will be 72 virgins and eternal bliss!! I believe that he will be eternally disappointed and I would regret that it were necessary that I participate in his disappointment and that I, moreover, would be especially regretful that I could not convince him of his "hollow hope" while he were still living in this world!!" - Leon O. Burke, M.D.

"The third comment I cannot answer without a definition of what is intended to be torture. Some techniques of obtaining information may be considered torture by some while others do not. I cannot condone permanent injury or death." - Bryant Sheehy, MD

"The moral justification for my agreement with question one is self defense. To protect oneself and those of many innocent that would be injured, maimed or killed due to terrorist actions which is a blatant disregard for life requires extreme measures beyond rules of war. The terrorists have made their rules, and until everyone of them is locked up so they can do no harm, we are morally obligated to search them for our collective protection."

- Stephen Mandaro, MD

"I think physicians need to use the Hippocratic oath as a starting point for issues such as this. Even if it were not implicit in the Hippocratic oath, I would then turn to the Geneva convention as a guide into what I believe to be ethical. I would personally find it hard to condone torture under any circumstances, even if it involved a family member."

- Sidney Scudder, MD

"Holy @\$%#&*!!!! This is the weirdest poll yet. We actually need to discuss the ethical issues involved with Joseph Mengele medical techniques? It is appalling that these issues have actually come up in sane discussions between physicians. The editorial committee is now beginning to scare me." - Don Hause, MD

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society
5380 Elvas Avenue #100 • Sacramento, CA 95819
916.452.2671 PH • 916.452.2690 FX • Email: info@ssvms.org

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