



A voice from private practice

To the Editor: The advent of changes in legislation in 2003, particularly with regard to private practice and so-called perverse incentives, has resulted in substantial changes in the average private practitioner's relationship with the pharmaceutical industry. While the idea is noble with regard to perverse inducements, the practical applications of the above need to be reassessed one year later.

It is clear to me that much of this legislation was introduced by colleagues not in private practice, and unexpected consequences have occurred. The following are some points that need to be highlighted and revisited.

1. The advent of strict control over CPD meetings has resulted in practical problems, for example a doctor who works a 10-hour day (the average) must go to a meeting straight from work and be expected to listen to another 2 hours of instruction without food or light snacks. The reality of the situation is that by 21h00 you are starving. Alternatively you must bring along your own supper, which is clearly ridiculous. The direct consequences of the above are that the average colleague has not been attending these meetings as much as before.

2. The stress and strain of private practice is much higher than it was several years ago, which impacts severely on the GP's private life. The exclusion of one's partner from CPD events has resulted in increasing isolation of doctors and their families from their colleagues. Both doctor and partner are unable to vent or discuss their frustrations with one another. This must impact negatively on the doctor's private life.

3. The visit by the pharmaceutical representative has at times become embarrassing. Instead of learning and judging pharmaceutical representatives and their integrity with respect to their drugs, the role of the pharmaceutical representative has degenerated to a 'stop and drop' delivery service. The result of this is that the GP in practice is not as informed about new medications as previously, and there is a sense of increasing isolation especially among those of our colleagues in solo practices.

4. This increasing isolation and decreasing interaction among colleagues has led to doctors becoming insecure, unhappy and in the current climate, frankly desperate. The options available to the practitioner under such threats must include radical decisions such as emigration. This represents a severe impact on our profession and can no longer be ignored.

The purpose of this letter is to highlight to the authorities the crisis faced by desperate practitioners. The authorities should note that that family practitioners constitute the backbone of health care in this country, and if their will and integrity are battered any further the whole system will collapse.

I feel very strongly that only a small number of my colleagues are at fault with regard to dishonest practice, and

that it is a basic fault in disciplinary procedure to blame us as a group. The vast majority of us are honest, hardworking medical practitioners who really care about our patients, and we are being made to suffer accordingly.

The reality of practice today is that one can no longer afford to take time off for a medical conference as the costs involved and loss of income are prohibitive. This is reflected by poor attendance at local conferences, and by inference the lack of knowledge filtering through to the backbone of health care in this country. I urge those in authority to change their style away from one of blanket blame — rather find the individuals who are guilty and restore the moral fibre that our profession so richly deserves.

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What Islam does not need is a pope!

To the Editor: I refer to your editorial entitled 'What Islam needs is a pope' in the June *SAMJ*.¹

The 'largely unearned stigmatisation of Islam that is currently on the rise' has less to do with the absence of an 'authoritative voice' than with insidious Islam phobia. This is blatantly evident in the media coverage of world events. Christianity did not become the issue in the fiery disaster at Waco, Texas, or in the Oklahoma City bombing. Judaism did not feature in the case of Bernard Goldstein when he murdered 29 Palestinians at prayer in the Hebron mosque. Neither was Hinduism castigated when religious fanatics in India destroyed the Barbiri mosque. Yet the religion of 'perpetrators' becomes particularly important when they happen to be Muslim.

The 'horrific execution by decapitation' of an innocent American by hooded men yelling *Allahu Akbar* has raised more questions than answers as to who actually perpetrated this callous and barbaric execution. But now that it appears that the Americans themselves may have killed him there is a sudden chill of silence in the media. Is it fair to ask Muslims to condemn the murder when the entire incident is shrouded in such mystery?

Not surprisingly, since 11 September 2001 virtually every state confronting an insurgency or separatist movement has eagerly jumped on the 'war on terrorism' bandwagon, branding its domestic opponents as 'terrorists'. The 'war on terror' is the Trojan horse that has sanitised violence against innocent men, women and children; it has legitimised pre-emptive strikes, endorsed the callous treatment of 'prisoners' and sanctified blackmail and corruption. The 'war on terror' has given the green light to assassinations and has led to abandonment of the due process of law in favour of brute



force. Where is the collective voice of a civilisation that claims to have extricated itself from the 'medieval time warp'?

To simply attribute the rise of polio to the 'exhortation against immunisation by Islamic clerics' is not only a gross over-simplification of the problem, but also an unjust indictment of the Muslim masses of Nigeria, who as Muslims, do not subscribe to the blind following of a pontiff, or to the infallibility of a clerical hierarchy.

The establishment of the caliphate is very different from the authoritative voice of a pope, since the former embraces rule with political authority while the latter separates religion from politics. What the Muslim world needs is a caliphate with political muster to divest itself from both internal and external belligerence.

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1. Ncayiyana D. What Islam needs is a pope (Editorial). *S Afr Med J* 2004; 94: 385.

To the Editor: I wish to respond to your recent editorial in the *SAMJ*.¹

I share your angst at the image of Islam, 'one of the world's great religions', currently being portrayed in the Western world.¹ The beheadings and other drastic and dramatic actions of a minority of Muslims reinforce the Western view that Muslims condone these actions. According to the precepts of Islam,² non-Muslims in Muslim countries must be accorded equal status as Muslims.

Many arguments are offered in explanation of the descent of the Muslim world into chaos and not all of these can be dealt with here. Why would any human being want to engage in acts such as these repugnant beheadings and suicide bombings that Edward Said called 'an insanity that must be abandoned'?³ Furthermore, does this desire to kill in such a horrific manner grow out of thin air?

I have previously argued that Saddam could easily have been removed without a war that has resulted in the loss of innocent lives.⁴ There are no weapons of mass destruction or links between Iraq and al-Qaeda. The regular forays of the US-backed Israeli military machine into Palestinian areas always



results in wide-scale destruction of innocent lives and property.⁵ It is an out-of-proportion response to acts of terror by a sophisticated military and leadership whose hatred for the Palestinians knows no bounds. Israel refuses to negotiate because the Palestinians do not recognise Israel's right to exist. The South African experience gives lie to this claim.

The question is why the USA ignored genocide in Rwanda, the open defiance of North Korea's nuclear threat and why it aids and abets Israel's criminal acts in the occupied territories? Tom Friedman of the *New York Times* says it would be laughable to deny that the USA was going into Iraq for anything but the oil.^{6,7} Israel's security is the other top priority of the USA.⁴

You will agree, my friend, that the lives of ordinary people must be a living hell in Falluja, Jenin, Hebron,⁵ etc. It is their voices that must be heard, not that of a Pope equivalent. They are victims of the greed and biblical righteousness of the Western powers, on a divine mission against Muslims, backed by prejudice of the worst kind. They create the fertile breeding grounds for those who behead and bomb in the name of Islam.

Muslims, too, need to question their accommodation of undemocratic regimes and see the value of democratic governance in a rigorous separation of mosque and state.

They also urgently need to heed the injunction of Mohammed to 'seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave', advice that is relevant for all times.

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1. Ncayiyana D. What Islam needs is a pope (Editorial). *S Afr Med J* 2004; 94: 385.
2. Armstrong K. *The Battle for God. Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. Harper Collins, 2000.
3. Said E. It's time for the Palestinian people to end this insanity. *Sunday Times*, 2004; 23 June.
4. Mall AS. Rather than spreading its hegemony, US may learn from Mandela. *Cape Times* 2003; 15 October.
5. MacIntyre D. Breaking silence over Hebron. *The Independent* (UK) 2004; 23 June.
6. Friedman TL. A war for oil? *New York Times* 2003; 5 January.
7. Ali T. *The Clash of Fundamentalisms. Crusades, Jihads and Modernity*. Verso, 2002.

To the Editor: Your editorial in the June 2004 *SAMJ*¹ was obviously intended to taunt Muslims and openly professes ignorance on matters that require constructive journalism. You have correlated health issues with politics and religion by misconstruing facts, and tend to be uninformed.

Islam is a religion of peace. It is a complete code of life and a guide to every aspect of human frailty. It offers solutions and guidance for humanity for all times and all ages. A true Muslim lives by this code of conduct and respects life, whether animal, plant or human and whatever other life there may be on earth or in the universe. Those who follow the divine laws of God are in complete harmony with the laws governing the universe.

Verily in the heaven and the earth are significant signs for those who believe in the working of the Divine law; and in the creation of yourselves and that of the moving creatures that are scattered (on the earth) are signs for those with assured knowledge (Quraan 45: 3-4).

When this harmony is disturbed within oneself, the environment or the universe, the repercussions are destructive and sometimes irreversible.

In Islam, we believe that God creates everything for a reason and a purpose. All life and especially micro-organisms in nature bear testimony to this truth. Unfortunately, science has not yet discovered the function of the virus. Human interference will eventually result in resistance and replication. This is the dilemma facing humanity when altering the influenza virus, the polio virus or the HIV virus.

And surely I (Satan) will lead them astray, and surely I will arouse desires in them, and surely I will command them and they will cut the cattle's ears, and surely I will command them and they will change Allah's creation. Whose chooseth Satan for a patron instead of Allah is verily a loser and his loss is manifest (Quraan 4: 119).

Islam made glorious progress in mathematics, medicine, science, astronomy etc., which was well preserved for mankind in the Great Library of Alexandria in Egypt. A well-planned act of terrorism was the theft of this wealth of knowledge and its distribution to the credit of the Western world. Yet another greater act of terrorism was the well-orchestrated destruction of the Khalifate, thereby disarming and neutralising the Islamic domain which could perhaps have made this world a better place in which to live. This present age is again characterised by the onslaught on Islam. Deception and propaganda are arousing frenzy and mistrust of Muslims from all sectors, initiated by those who rule the world today as self-proclaimed custodians of this planet. The forceful imposition of democratic rule will demoralise and dehumanise nations. Man-made ideologies do not have all the solutions to social, political, economic or scientific problems, which inevitably results in degradation and destitution. Direct interference in the cultural, moral or religious beliefs of people results in resistance and disapproval. The natural corollary to this phenomenon is the creation of mistrust and uprising against the injustices perpetrated by those who seek Arrogance, Power, Greed and Fortune at the expense of civil wars, inciting hatred and the deaths of millions in the conflicts of Africa, the Middle East, Yugoslavia, Chechnia or Afghanistan, to name but a few. No wonder that when injustice is opposed the terrorist label is applied to some, while glory and peace awards are bestowed on those who side with the ruling camp. Africa is one of the richest continents but her natural treasures are being swept away into the custody of those who portray themselves as 'good', while the teeming populations are consumed in the quagmire of impoverished debt, degrading poverty, destitution and disease.

Godless nations have no regard or respect for life and the



earth is made to swallow the putrefaction of their deeds in the name of civilisation and progress. It is men like you who play the fiddle and those who follow you dance to the tune only to please and entertain your masters while you remain enslaved.

Islam is diametrically opposed to your idea, because a Muslim lives to promote peace and justice and to eradicate oppression, thereby satisfying his duty and conscience and ultimate accountability only to his Creator.

A greater public health hazard could be avoided because in Islam the Bounty of the most Merciful God transcends over all its creatures, but lack of wisdom seldom prevails to illuminate the path of those in drunken stupor.

He it is who sent His Messenger (Muhammed SAW) with the guidance and the Religion of Truth, that He may cause it to prevail over all religion (way of life), however much the idolaters (infidels, pagans, polytheists) may hate it. (Quraan 9: 33).

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1. Ncayiyana D. What Islam needs is a pope (Editorial). *S Afr Med J* 2004; 94: 385.

To the Editor: Our beloved continent of Africa has had the misfortune of harbouring both immunisation and AIDS dissidents, which has undoubtedly encouraged the spread of both polio and HIV/AIDS.

The Papal institution in all its pomp and glory indeed exists as a guide to Catholic Christians.¹ But it has failed to control the priests who have sexually abused boys and young men in many Catholic communities. The Pope's silence was deafening during the reigns of terror of Hitler and Mussolini, and he has been silent again over the massacre of both Christians and Muslims in Palestine, Iraq and Bosnia. A pope-like authority is patently not the solution to the world's problems.

As fellow black South Africans, you and I both know the reason for the high crime rate in our country. What hope do our youth have if the hopelessness and grinding poverty of the rural areas and squatter camps is not relieved by prioritising job creation as opposed to arms purchases?

As you have so astutely understood 'the profound political and socio-economic underpinnings to the Islamist fundamentalist carnage, not least the politics of oil', you must fully appreciate the plight of refugees in squalid camps in Palestine, the daily Israeli state-sponsored terrorism on Palestinian sub-humans and the civilised American torture at Guantanamo Bay (Blair appealed to Bush to stop the torture of British prisoners there).

Sadly, I do not hear the Pope imploring Bush and Blair (good WASPs) to halt this carnage. Islam does not have a

monopoly on terrorism. So-called terrorists (remember that our own ex-president Nelson Mandela was honoured with this title) are products of Israeli, American and British terrorism. Have you seen the innocent old men, women and children of Shabra, Chatilla, Baghdad, Nablus, Jenin, Nicaragua and our own Soweto and Sharpeville?

Muslims are unlikely to regard the Christian Pope as much of an example to emulate when they see the havoc wreaked behind the facade of democracy by so-called good Christians like Bush and Blair, who use despots and self-appointed kings to uphold their new world order and to secure oil. The rape of Afghanistan and Vietnam, Iraq and Bosnia and support of Ariel Sharon are ample proof of their tyranny. The 'scientific desert' was created by Western-sponsored destabilisation, so that the Muslim scientists of today are found working in research programmes in the USA, the UK and Europe, having been forced to flee from their homelands.

Women's rights in Islam are entrenched in the Holy Quraan. If they are not applied, it is because of human transgression.

The khalifat in Islam had its appropriate lifespan, and its authority passed on to eminent scholars of jurisprudence. Like all scholars, including those battling HIV/AIDS, their voices are hoarse, because who listens to them?

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1. Ncayiyana DJ. What Islam needs is a pope (Editorial). *S Afr Med J* 2004; 94: 386.

Psychopathology and coping in recently diagnosed HIV/AIDS patients

To the Editor: We thank Dr Singh for raising several issues for discussion in his letter¹ in response to our paper.² He states that there is no evidence to support the hypothesis that women with HIV/AIDS may face greater stigmatisation than men, emphasises rather social inequality and poverty as risk factors for HIV infection in women, and recommends the inclusion of a particular stigma scale. Stigmatisation may well have been interesting to include, but it was not a primary object of study in this work, and the validity of the scale recommended by Singh has not yet been demonstrated in developing world contexts. Furthermore, we would point out that HIV/AIDS stigma and gender discrimination are constructs that appear to have considerable overlap.³

Dr Singh also questions the reliability of assessing sexual risk behaviour in a single interview, queries the assertion that men