

Army still using physicians in interrogation, bioethicist says

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U.S. Army psychiatrists may be participating in the interrogation of detainees, while ignoring recommendations to the contrary from professional medical associations, according to a Penn State bioethicist and a Georgetown University law professor.

"The American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the American Medical Association (AMA) adopted positions in 2006 that basically said physicians should not be directly involved in any interrogation of any individual," said Jonathan Marks, associate professor of bioethics, humanities and law, and acting director of the Rock Ethics Institute. "According to them this is not what physicians should be doing, whether the interrogation is aggressive or not, or legal or not."

Yet documents recently provided to Marks and M. Gregg Bloche, professor of law, Georgetown University Law Center, by the U.S. Army in response to requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) reveal that the Department of Defense still wants physicians to be involved in interrogations and continues to resist the positions taken by the professional medical associations.

In an essay in the Sept. 11 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine, Marks and Bloche, both co-applicants in the FOIA request, point out that an October 2006 Army memo, known as the Behavioral Science Consultation Memo, seeks to undermine the positions of the two associations and tries to carve out a role for psychiatrists advising interrogators on individual interrogations.

"The Army is essentially telling physicians that during interrogations they are not acting as a health care provider but as a behavioral science advisor," Marks explained. "The memo goes a step further and suggests that monitoring might actually be helpful in preventing detainees from getting hurt."

According to Marks, who is also a barrister and an academic member of Matrix Chambers, London, the Army is trying to provide rationales to justify the participation of physicians in interrogation. It is seeking to persuade psychiatrists that there is still a good reason for their involvement, despite the positions adopted by the professional associations.

Other documents provided in response to the FOIA requests also indicate that, as of October 2007, at least five psychiatrists had undergone training as behavioral science consultants after the AMA and APA adopted their restrictive policies. The Department of Defense memo expires on October 20, 2008, and while its fate is unclear, the government should not renew it, say Marks and Bloche, also adjunct professor, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, and nonresident senior fellow, Brookings Institution.

"There are problems with this memo. If they do revise it, they should embrace the position of the AMA and the APA, instead of trying to persuade physicians to ignore their policies," added Marks.

Source: Penn State

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