

The strange story of the Lancet editor and Israel

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The *Lancet* is one of the most prestigious medical journals in Britain and the world, but has also been a major source of immoral demonization and political warfare against Israel. Under Dr. Richard Horton, editor since 1995, it has published numerous pseudo-scientific articles falsely accusing Israel of war crimes, including causing birth defects among Palestinians.



And yet, on Oct. 2, Horton suddenly arrived in Israel as a guest of Haifa's Rambam Hospital. Though he has been to Ramallah's Birzeit University numerous times, and also to Jerusalem's Augusta Victoria Hospital, which serves primarily Palestinians, he never took the short walk to Hadassah Hospital to meet Israeli doctors and patients – Jews and Arabs alike.

Horton's Israel visit was not triggered by a sudden moral awakening. Instead, he came under extreme duress, after being publicly embarrassed for having published a scurrilous letter during the Gaza war that repeated the standard anti-Israeli propaganda while erasing 4,560 Hamas rocket attacks.

More importantly, NGO Monitor's research team exposed the activities of two of the primary authors – Dr. Paola Manduca and Dr. Swee Ang Chai – in promoting hard core anti-Semitism, including a video featuring white supremacist David Duke. Only after this information was featured in Britain's *Daily Telegraph*, Elsevier, the multinational publisher-owner of the *Lancet*, responded to the pressure. The naming and shaming of Horton and the extremist circle around him compelled him to act, bringing him to Rambam's doorstep.

Long before the infamous Gaza letter, Manduca and Swee Ang were *Lancet* regulars. Horton published articles that they had co-authored, including Manduca's "birth defects" series. Funding for one of these studies came from Interpal, for which Manduca has also raised money. The United States has designated Interpal as a terrorist entity "utilized to hide the flow of money to Hamas."

At no time did Horton do the necessary due diligence required of an editor. He did not question the standard statements by the authors of the Gaza letter claiming that they had no conflicts of interest, although a number are active in anti-Israel NGOs that exploit medicine for propaganda. Manduca is with the New Weapons Committee, which has made unsubstantiated claims that Israel "experimented" with new weapons on Gazans and Lebanese. Swee Ang co-founded and remains a leader of Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), which is very active in promoting the Palestinian political cause.

Horton himself has a clear conflict, stemming from his central role in the Lancet-Palestinian Health Alliance, which meets annually at Birzeit University, largely to bash Israel. The LPHA was founded by a group of Palestinian and international researchers that includes Rita Giacaman and Abdullatif Hussaini

of Birzeit University as well as Horton.

During his week of meetings in Israel and a subsequent editorial in the *Lancet*, Horton refused to engage on this history and his responsibility for the immoral and hate-filled anti-Israel campaigns. He acknowledged the obvious – that the Gaza letter “does not describe the full reality,” expressed regret at the “unnecessary polarization,” and referred to the anti-Semitic video as “abhorrent.”

Skeptics see this as a temporary effort to avoid a major investigation, while Horton’s Israeli hosts hope for a genuine, if partial, atonement. Perhaps Horton’s role in the unethical war against Israel does not reflect inherent anti-Semitism, but rather overriding ambition and the influence of his social and intellectual milieu.

Regardless, the pressure must continue until Horton, the *Lancet*, and Elsevier (the publisher) issue clear apologies, retract the hate-filled articles that were never worthy of publication, and create mechanisms to prevent a recurrence.

More broadly, in fighting the unethical demonization of Israel and the new anti-Semitism, this case demonstrates the importance of naming and shaming the perpetrators. By exposing the role of the *Lancet* in this unethical behaviour, we have shown that success is possible.