

Richard Horton's war on Israel

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Richard Horton is the editor of The Lancet, which is often referred to as one of the most prestigious British medical journals. For many years, he has used (or abused) that position to publish political tracts and pseudo-scientific articles, particularly but not limited to one-sided attacks against Israel.

Although Horton has withstood past criticism of his role, he is now faced with his most serious crisis, following publication of NGO Monitor's report showing that Dr. Paola Manduca and Dr. Swee Ang – two of the main authors of an "Open Letter for the People of Gaza" published in the Lancet – are promoting David Duke, the notorious American racist. Among their other radical activities, Manduca and Swee Ang sent out emails endorsing one of Duke's pathologically anti-Semitic videos entitled, "CNN Goldman Sachs & the Zio-Matrix."

This is not an isolated incident – for years, Manduca has been involved in spreading unsupported accusations regarding diabolical Israeli weapons, and she has also disseminated articles and made comments with anti-Semitic content. As editor, Horton published three articles by Manduca that included pseudo-scientific allegations that Israel caused birth defects in Gaza.

For her part, Swee Ang was a founder of Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), a political advocacy NGO that collects funds for and is involved in demonizing Israel. When asked about the Zio-Matrix video, she responded, "I am concerned that if there is any truth in the video, that Jews control the media, politics and banking, what on earth is going on? I was worried." Had Horton done a quick background check, he would also have discovered Swee Ang's close links to the Perdana Global Peace Foundation, headed by Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad, well known for his blatant anti-Semitism.

Following his usual practice, Horton initially dismissed criticism for giving Manduca, Swee Ang, Mads Gilbert (who justified the 9-11 terror attacks on the US and co-authored the tendentious Gaza letter) and other supporters of hate a platform in the Lancet. Horton has withstood censure for trampling on the requirements of scientific integrity and methodology (as in the case of a 1998 article falsely linking a childhood vaccine with autism), and for participating in the annual, politically-loaded Lancet Palestinian Health Alliance conference held at Birzeit University.

Based on this track record, Horton had reason to believe that the latest revelations regarding the authors of the Lancet's Gaza letter being overt racists would also not threaten his well-fortified position. When first confronted with the evidence, Horton told The Daily Telegraph, "It's utterly irrelevant.

It's a smear campaign.... I don't honestly see what all this has to do with the Gaza letter. I have no plans to retract the letter, and I would not retract the letter even if it was found to be substantiated."

But this time, the story did not disappear, and in response to the growing pressure to resign, (The Jewish Chronicle reports an investigation has been initiated) Horton arranged a trip to Israel this week. He is scheduled to spend four days with doctors from several Israeli hospitals, during which they will show him that Israel is not evil, that Jewish and Arab patients are treated as equals, and that Israel also gives world-class treatment to hundreds of civilians wounded in the brutal Syrian civil war.

For his part, Horton has announced that he expects to "listen and learn," and to "quietly explain" his actions.

However, there are no words that Horton could possibly invoke to explain away, whitewash, or excuse his many and systematic contributions to the abuse of a scientific journal for spreading hate, lies and

demonization.

The incitement to hate in the Gaza letter, including false allegations of “war crimes,” “the use of gas,” references to “the military onslaught on civilians in Gaza under the guise of punishing terrorists,” and the absence of any reference to the 4,560 rockets from Gaza – each one a war crime – is blatantly immoral and indefensible.

Indeed, Horton can be expected to exploit this visit in order to claim legitimacy from the Israeli medical community, so that he can continue in his position and exploit the façade of medicine to promote himself and his private agenda. There is no basis for expecting that under Horton, the Lancet will begin publishing articles on the morality of the Israeli medical community, or on the legitimacy of responding to Palestinian terror. Instead, in responding to accusations of misconduct in Britain, Horton will be able to refer to Israeli hospitals and seminars at which he was welcomed, and to the complex and differing perspectives.

Some mistakes can be corrected, some crimes can be forgiven, and some apologies can be accepted. But not in this case; damage from chronic and hate-filled political warfare is irreversible. Horton has been irrevocably named and shamed; if he does not resign, it is up to the publisher, the global Reed Elsevier Group, to do the right thing.

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