

## **IFHHRO | Medical Human Rights Network Policy Paper**

### **Introduction**

IFHHRO | Medical Human Rights Network was established in 1989 as an informal network of human rights concerned health professionals, who share the conviction that health professionals have a crucial role to play in the defence and promotion of human rights. Health professionals are often the first, and in many cases the only ones, to witness and identify human rights violations, because victims of these violations turn to these professionals for help, healing and support. Health professionals will for instance see the wounds inflicted by torture, diagnose the mental damage of torture, and they will experience the sequelae in case of absence of adequate health care.

In addition, health professionals have a fundamental role to play in providing and mobilizing their expertise for identifying and documenting human rights violations, using for example the Istanbul Protocol (documentation of torture sequelae) and the Minnesota Protocol (documentation of political killings and mass graves). They also play a key role in areas where human rights are at risk, such as prison health, hunger strikes, refugee health care, and military health.

IFHHRO | Medical Human Rights Network is an organization of health professionals for health professionals, with the objective to promote human rights awareness and advocacy among health professionals as widely and profoundly as possible.

The organization started as an informal network of representatives of organizations and established a support foundation in the Netherlands in 2002. Financial support by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ICCO and the Open Society Foundations made it possible for IFHHRO to organize many conferences, training sessions, development of policy positions and participation in campaigns such as the 'Campaign against Torture in Healthcare Settings'.

In 2017 the organization transformed from a federation of organizations into a (web-based) organization of individual (and groups of) health professionals concerned about human rights, with more emphasis on the use of social media. Activities of the organization are based on involvement of volunteers.

## **Mission & Vision**

The mission of IFHHRO is to mobilize health workers for the worldwide progressive realization of health-related human rights. Our vision is the full enjoyment of health-related human rights by everyone at all times.

## **Strategies**

IFHHRO supports the mobilization of health professionals for human rights through:

1) advocacy on social media, and 2) information, education and communication activities.

We facilitate the sharing of experiences and human rights concerns of health professionals to advance mutual support. Specific projects on the promotion of health-related human rights are focused on the role of health professionals.

### *Activities:*

- Facilitating information and communication exchanges between health professionals through social media
- Offering mutual support and exposure of threats to health professionals who are working on human rights
- Providing online training and education
- Developing position statements
- Conducting projects on the implementation of the right to health

## **History**

IFHHRO | Medical Human Rights Network (previously known as the International Federation of Health and Human Rights Organizations) started in 1989 as an informal network of health and human rights organizations upon an initiative of Physicians for Human Rights (USA) and the Johannes Wier Foundation (The Netherlands). Representatives met annually in international conferences on a variety of health-related human rights topics, including:

- Prison health
- Torture
- Forensic expertise in political mass killings
- Gender and communal violence
- Health care under attack
- The right to health
- Exclusion and inequalities in health care

## **Our track record**

- Involved in drafting the Istanbul Protocol
- Consulted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the drafting of General Comment 14 (on the Right to Health)
- Cooperated intensively with the first Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health
- Produced an expert opinion for the European Court of Human Rights
- One of the organizations involved in the Campaign against Torture in Healthcare
- Involved in several fact-finding missions, the development and dissemination of several position statements and courses on health and human rights

## **Activities in 2018**

In 2018 IFHHRO had the following activities:

- Distributing information on health and human rights topics on social media (Facebook and Twitter)
- Building a new and up-to-date website on the linkages between health and human rights
- Completing articles on health and human rights topics on the website
- Health and human rights training to students and professionals
- Health and human rights-related consultancies and advice
- Participating in the project Istanbul Protocol Supplement
- Designing the 'Dignity at the Bedside' project
- Designing the 'Empowering Roma Mothers and Babies' project

## **Activities 2019**

- Continuing and expanding relevant health and human rights posts on social media: Facebook and Twitter
- Continuing and expanding writing articles on health and human rights topics on the website
- Providing education and training on health and human rights issues for students and health and/or law professionals
- Realizing the first phase of the 'Dignity at the Bedside' project, i.e., composing a toolbox for health professionals on the implementation of the Right to Health
- Organizing a meet-up with related organizations and individuals to explore further cooperation and how to strengthen the organization
- Strengthening collaboration with medical student organizations and universities
- Inviting further collaboration with specific professional groups (e.g., forensic medicine)

## **Organization**

IFHHRO is a volunteer-run organization. This means that financial compensation of volunteers is restricted to travel expenses. The international secretariat is based in the Netherlands.

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## **Board members:**

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## **Financial report 2018**

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