



VIOLENCE AGAINST HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS IN TURKEY: MEDICO-LEGAL APPROACH WITH TWO CASES

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INTRODUCTION and PURPOSE

The violence against healthcare professionals increased dramatically in Turkey. Many healthcare professionals were exposed to physical violence and some were killed in the healthcare facilities. Despite of the heavy working conditions, long hours of working shifts, lack of staff and security measures healthcare professionals continue to work and fulfill their duties under these threats and events. For this reason, as a part of the increase of violence in the healthcare areas in Turkey, Ministry of Health began to take action and prepared some regulations about this issue. White Code system started to be used in hospitals, "ALO 113 Code White" emergency phone number and notice system were established on May 14, 2012 and violent incidents have started to be recorded through this system on the Ministry of Health's website. With this system, even healthcare personnel don't make a complaint about the abuser, legal procedure is transferred to prosecution without waiting a complaint from the victim (1,2,3). The White Code system process is explained below:

When the violent act occurs

- ✓ Dial White Code number for hospital)
- ✓ Transfer of security guards is provided for the violent act (if the violent act is big, law enforcement is informed)
 - ✓ Security guards and directors fill official report to explain the act
 - ✓ Hospital management call '113 White Code' and fill the 'White Code Registration Form'
 - ✓ As it doesn't depend on complaint, legal procedure should be started by the directors
- ✓ White Code Unit lawyers investigate the event if the judicial authorities are informed about the violent act /if not White Code Unit lawyers informs the judicial authorities immediately
 - ✓ Ministry Law Unit asks the personnel if they require legal help/if they require legal help, legal help is provided according to regulations (4,5)

In this study, the effectiveness of the actions that Ministry of Health has taken since 2012 was discussed. As the White Code system started to be used, the actions that Ministry of Health has taken were discussed via two cases in Turkey.



CASE – 1

S.K brought their baby to Blood Draw Unit to make the necessary tests in 2014. After his wife's words "Aren't you a man, get into the room!" he entered the nurse's working area and wanted the nurse to take the blood of their baby immediately. While nurse was drawing the blood, S.K. yelled as "What are you laughing at?" and humiliated the nurse and the other patient in the room. He kept yelling as "I am Agha, I will shot you from the head, I will kill you all, I will come back with 40 men!" Health personnel dialed the White Code number of hospital and family left the hospital. Half an hour later S.K. and his relatives came back to the hospital again with weapons. S.K. yelled with frustrated voice and said "We are here to get them!" Directors noticed the White Code Unit about this situation and recorded the event on Ministry of Health's website by filling the White Code Notice Form. Hospital's lawyer made an official complaint for 'intimidation' about S.K. Following this event, the family kept coming to the hospital for his child's examinations and treatments. As the father threatened to kill the health personnel again, lawyers protected the health personnel's right and they followed the 'Personnel Safety Circular'. As a requirement of this circular, 'the right of withdrawal from given service' was put in place.

As a result of the prosecution, S.K was condemned to 2.000 Turkish liras (nearly 670 Euro) after one year from the first incident.



CASE – 2

Twin brothers are brought by their parents to the pediatric outpatient clinic in 2014. They wanted their child to be examined without an appointment. Responsible hospital personnel told parents that all of the doctors' schedule were full and they need to get an appointment taken before. Yet personnel offered the family that an emergency physician could examine their child in case of an emergency situation. But parents didn't accept this offer and father of twins threatened and raised his voice to pediatrician on duty and said "You have to exam our babies!". Afterwards patient relations personnel was called. Responsible personnel informed the family and took the family to ER service. The examination was held and the triage color scheme was established as "green", means don't need an acute treatment. Father oppressed the cashier to pay for one child's examination and yelled and threatened the personnel saying "I will bury you all!" Mother of twins threatened the personnel as she was a lawyer. White Code number of hospital is dialed. Directors noticed the White Code Unit about this situation and recorded the event on Ministry of Health's website by filling the White Code Notice Form.

Hospital's lawyer made an official complaint for 'verbal hostility and intimidation'. When the parents was called from police department for their statement, they learned the complaint. They requested reconciliation in their statement. As the mother is a lawyer and will have an exam about prosecution and don't want this complaint in her personal record, they came back to hospital with presents to apologize. They told that they read about White code system in the internet and they learned that prison sentence was in question for further time. This situation intimidated them. They expressed that this event was a lesson and they won't do this kind of thing again.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In 2013, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Commission of Prevention of Violence in Health proposed a report that gives recommendations for eliminating violence against health care professionals. Some recommendations from the report include:

- ✓ Without making discrimination between public and private health care, standard violence management policy and legal procedure should be established and implemented.
- ✓ Security measures should be increased in areas where the risk of violence is greater by performing risk assessment in health care facilities,
- ✓ All the entrance gates should be secured and different measures should be taken for different entrances by security forces.
- ✓ Arrangements should be done for the security forces to ensure their transition at the scene simultaneously.
- ✓ Time allocated to patients should be increased by eliminating uneven distribution and inadequacy of health care professionals,
- ✓ Health workers' shift hours should be re-organized, long working hours should be abandoned.
- ✓ Stimulating panels, containing information about violence, should be provided in all healthcare facilities.
- ✓ In this regard, health care facility security forces should be educated and trained for all kind of violence.
- ✓ To create public awareness and to provide a deterrence against violence, conviction verdicts for the regarded crime should be shared with the public through the media. (3,6,7).

Post-incident response and evaluation are important factors to an effective violence prevention program. Investigating incidents of healthcare workplace violence thoroughly will provide a roadmap to prevent fatalities and injuries for future incidents (8,9,10).

Two cases' results that are explained above were on behalf of healthcare professionals. The second case was held legally and eventuated as reconciliation in the presence of prosecutor. The results show the positive effects of the action that Ministry of Health takes. But despite of the actions that are taken by Ministry of Health and the recommendations proposed by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Commission of Prevention of Violence in Health, White Code system and recommendations couldn't show the positive expected results as the two cases listed above. As a result of the failure of the system healthcare professionals avoid to start the White Code system in hospital and further legal process for many reasons in Turkey. Because they think the process was useless and taking too much time.

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