

## How Health Professionals Can Help Medical Justice



There are over 3000 people detained in the UK in Immigration Removal Centres (detention centres) at any one time. They include asylum seekers who are still waiting for decisions on their cases, refused asylum seekers and other migrants. Many have experienced trauma before coming to the UK. Detention centres are closed, prison-like establishments but detainees are not serving a criminal sentence. There is no time limit on detention for immigration purposes and detainees do not serve a specific term. They can be released at any time, or remain detained for years. The majority of detainees are detained for less than 3 months, but a significant number stay longer than 2 years.

Our experience shows that many detainees have serious medical and psychological conditions which are not recognised, poorly treated or even ignored while in detention. The process of detention itself is also often very damaging to their health. By joining the Medical Justice network, health professionals can have a positive impact on the lives and health of this most vulnerable group of people in the UK.



### Visiting detainees

Volunteer doctors, midwives and psychologists visit people in detention centres regarding various medical issues. This can include assessing scars of torture, assessing ongoing health problems, advising about what medical treatment should be provided, or assessing injuries following an alleged assault. A letter or medico-legal report may need to be written.

Visiting a detainee and writing a report can be time-consuming (half a day for the visit + time for writing the report) but it may make all the difference to the detainee's

health or to the outcome of their asylum claim. Medical Justice offers training and mentoring in how to conduct such visits and new volunteers are paired up with an experienced volunteer in their first visits. Note that volunteers cannot provide treatment to detainees and would be advising or writing reports rather than treating clients.

### How You Can Help Without Having To Leave Your Desk

Those who are not in a position to visit detainees can help in other ways:

- Give medical advice by phone/email : e.g. to detainees, solicitors, and MJ volunteers - this could include issues surrounding treatment, getting test results, advice on anti-malarials, etc. We have a wide range of specialists, including psychiatrists, HIV physicians, obstetricians, paediatricians, midwives, psychologists, etc, who provide specialist advice on individual cases.
- Write letters and reports based on medical records and/or a telephone assessment.
- Invite a speaker from MJ to your CPD group or practice/hospital meeting.

### Medical Justice hold training days to introduce clinicians to our work

See our website [www.medicaljustice.org.uk](http://www.medicaljustice.org.uk) or contact us for dates of our training days. These are for registered health professionals interested to find out more about volunteering. They cover an introduction to immigration detention, health problems common in detainees, and an introduction to medico-legal work with this group of patients.



### Further information

Please email [info@medicaljustice.org.uk](mailto:info@medicaljustice.org.uk) if you would like to join the Medical Justice mailing list or information about the next medics training event. Please email [n.hartree@medicaljustice.org.uk](mailto:n.hartree@medicaljustice.org.uk) if you are qualified medic and would like to discuss how you can volunteer.