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Guardian Leader Pages

## **Force feeding at Guantanamo Bay**

Dr David Nicholl Dr Bernadette Gregory Prof Elwyn Elias Dr Michael Peel And 14 other doctors  
The Guardian  
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We write as concerned physicians regarding the medical attention being given to the detainees on hunger strike in Guantanamo Bay, including, according to Amnesty, at least six British residents. US military spokesmen confirm that 22 hunger strikers are being force-fed. The World Medical Association specifically prohibits the force-feeding of hunger strikers.

Fundamental to doctors' responsibilities in attending a hunger striker is the recognition that prisoners have the same right as any other patient to refuse medical treatment. Our own government has respected this basic human and legal right, even under very difficult political circumstances, and allowed hunger strikers to die in Northern Ireland in the early 1980s. Doctors (and politicians) do not have to agree with the aims of the prisoner or the steps the prisoner is taking, but they must respect the prisoner's informed decision. Doctors breaching guidelines should be held to account by their professional bodies. We would urge the UK government, which so far has remained silent, to intervene to ensure that those British residents being held in Guantanamo are being properly assessed medically by independent physicians and ensure that techniques such as force-feeding are abandoned forthwith in accordance with internationally agreed legal and ethical standards.

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Viewpoint