

Advocacy Rx

WHAT IS ADVOCACY IN HEALTHCARE?

Advocacy is a fundamental aspect of being a physician, yet its practical implications are often vaguely defined in medical education curriculums and organizational objectives. What does it truly mean to be a physician advocate? It is difficult to place a specific definition or role for a physician advocate, given the many roles that physicians play in the healthcare system. Patient care advocacy such as arranging shelter for an unhoused patient or enrolling a patient in a medication-assistance program are commonly recognized, they represent just a fraction of the broader scope of advocacy in medicine. Advocacy goes beyond traditional biomedicine, addressing underlying social determinants that significantly impact a patient's health and well-being. Recognizing that social determinants of health are key drivers of healthcare disparities and contribute to adverse health outcomes highlights the importance of addressing them.

However, the scope of advocacy extends beyond the individual patient. At its core, physician advocacy must also encompass the promotion of social justice, the dismantling of historical inequities, and the defense of human rights. Despite the widespread endorsement of advocacy among physicians, studies have shown that few actively engage in advocacy efforts. The goal of the GHHS Advocacy Rx column is to shed light on the interpersonal, structural, and systemic factors affecting global and public health, with direct implications on any individual patient's health. From local community concerns to international crises, a myriad of health topics warrant exposure and discussion.

Through this column, we aim to provide valuable insights, resources, and links for further education and avenues for involvement. We hope to encourage all MCG students and Wellstar MCG staff to learn about and pursue healthcare advocacy, continuing to provide the best care for our patients and our surrounding community.

-Lexi Price, MS4



The Advocacy Rx Newsletter is provided by the Advocacy Committee of the Gold Humanism Honor Society at the Medical College of Georgia. We are a group of students committed to improving healthcare for all through health education, community building, and speaking out against injustice. As medical students in the United States, we are situated at a position of privilege and power, but as junior medical colleagues, we are not immune to mistakes. We strive to improve our knowledge and skills just as much as we hope to spread awareness of healthcare issues, inequality, and disparities that afflict vulnerable and marginalized communities. These editorials are intended to start a conversation about the topics highlighted, not to give a complete dissertation of the subject. We hope that you as readers can contact us and provide crucial feedback throughout the course of this newsletter, and we can all grow and learn as a result. We hope you enjoy Advocacy Rx!

Eddie Xie
GHHS Vice President of Advocacy

Advocacy Committee Members

Eddie Xie	Madison James
Elexis Price	Sachi Shastri
Katherine Dunn	Sadhana Durbha
Gabriella Duchesne	Samantha Brener

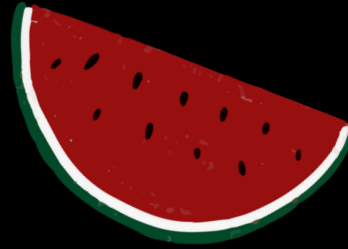
ADVOCACY RX-01

Written by: Lexi Price, MS4

Edited by: Eddie Xie, MS4



PEACE



HUMANITARIAN CRISIS: PALESTINE (AS OF JUNE 2024)

Written by Lexi Price, MS4

Edited by Eddie Xie, MS4

Occupation-related violence in Palestine escalated in October of 2023 and continues to worsen with each passing day. The conflict in Gaza has led to severe destruction, death, and displacement among Palestinian civilians. Beyond the persistent threat of bombs and airstrike attacks, Palestinian civilians grapple with a multitude of additional challenges, all threatening their overall health.

The healthcare system, already under strain due to a lack of medical supplies and inadequate infrastructure, is struggling to provide basic care. Many hospitals have been destroyed by airstrikes and bombings, leaving chronic diseases untreated as limited resources are prioritized to treat war-related injuries.

Humanitarian aid is severely restricted due to border closures and the blockade of supply entry, leaving Gaza's population without access to food, clean water, and daily necessities, pushing them to the brink of famine. Shockingly, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) recently reported that the entire population of the Gaza Strip (~2.2 million people) is in IPC Phase 3 (crisis or worse), marking the highest level of acute food insecurity ever recorded. The IPC estimates that between March to July of 2024, 1.1 million individuals in Gaza will classify as IPC Phase 5 (catastrophic food insecurity), the highest phase denoted.

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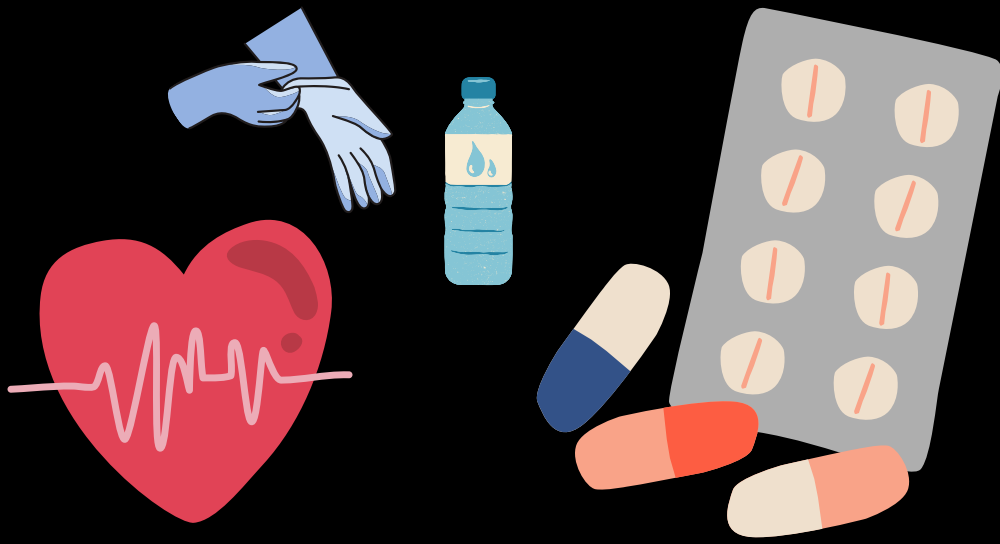
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Furthermore, unhygienic conditions, limited healthcare services, and overcrowded living spaces have created a fertile environment for the rapid spread of infectious diseases, with large-scale epidemics imminent. Compounded by malnutrition and dehydration, even commonplace illnesses pose a fatal threat. Diseases such as acute diarrhea, hepatitis, and scabies are already spreading rapidly. Access to water and sanitation are internationally recognized human rights, yet they remain unmet. The psychological toll of war on civilians, especially children, cannot be overstated. The repercussions are profound and will have long-lasting effects on mental health for generations to come.

It is undeniable that Palestine is facing a dire humanitarian and healthcare crisis, necessitating urgent advocacy and support from the global community. Although many of us agree that politics should not interfere with medical decision making, politics continues to and will continue to dictate our place in medicine. However, we can objectively see the catastrophic effects of war and political violence on innocent civilians – and mostly women and children. While direct opportunities to aid those affected by the conflict may seem elusive as we sit across the world on our laptops and phones, it is imperative to educate oneself about global crises and disseminate information to raise awareness among others. Moreover, as students in the global north, we must continue to advocate for the health and wellbeing of all our fellow people across the globe. Follow the link below to learn more and donate to humanitarian aid efforts in Palestine.

