

Although antisemitism has been a problem within Ontario faculties of medicine for several years (see, for example [Kuper 2023](#)), since October 7<sup>th</sup> the experience of their Jewish medical faculty members and students has deteriorated significantly. Their experiences of discrimination have largely been ignored by their non-Jewish colleagues and leaders. Moreover, when Jewish medical faculty members and students have attempted to speak out against the discrimination that they have been experienced, this has been weaponized against them. Their efforts to call out antisemitism have routinely been dismissed by a number of vocal individuals (physicians and others) using classic gaslighting techniques such as inversion (“you are racist and are making up antisemitism to cover it up”) and Jew-washing (“there is a Jew I know who doesn’t think this is antisemitic so all the rest of you who are offended by this are wrong”); they have also been harassed and threatened into silence through concerns about a combination of personal safety (up to and including death threats) and professional risk.

Educational leaders have repeatedly been faced with two competing narratives: the experience of a Jewish medical faculty member or student who has called out antisemitism, is targeted for it, and is then afraid to defend him/herself further lest s/he be singled out further as a target for harassment; and the loud public insistence (backed on social media by organizations like the Healthworkers Alliance for Palestine, the National Council of Canadian Muslims, and local, provincial, and national student organizations) that anyone taking someone to task for antisemitism is just being discriminatory against the person being accused of antisemitism. We have seen this accusation being leveled against the Jewish person who experienced the antisemitism, but it has also surfaced during those very few occasions when faculties of medicine or individual medical faculty leaders have been seen to take action against antisemitism (e.g., when they have actually investigated a faculty member or learner who has been accused of antisemitism). When one vocal medical learner at the University of Ottawa was actually suspended quite soon after October 7 for comments on social media that many Jewish medical faculty members and students found offensive and hurtful, for example, the leaders of their Faculty of Medicine were targeted by social media campaigns, mass emails, and an online petition that garnered thousands of signatures from around the world. No wonder medical educational leaders who might otherwise have wanted to act to support their Jewish medical colleagues and students have been cowed into silence even when faced with blatant antisemitism, whether that antisemitism has been reported to them (by Jewish medical students and faculty members, whether directly to those leaders or through the slow, complex reporting systems that exist in many institutions) or has been carried out publicly (including students who openly complain to non-Jewish leaders about having to work with Jews or about those leaders being too accommodating to Jews).

Meanwhile Jewish medical faculty members and more senior Jewish medical learners are regularly subjected to a barrage of vexatious complaints on the basis of their being openly Jewish, including being openly Zionist (i.e., openly supportive of the existence of the State of Israel). In October and November 2023 this began to happen sporadically, with medical faculty members who pointed out antisemitic events in Canada or who were supportive of Israel (or of Israelis) in the immediate aftermath of October 7 being targeted online for email campaigns (with instructions for members of the public to email their teaching hospitals, university

departments, and the regulatory college through which they are licensed and complain that they are racist and Islamophobic). This became more systematic after 555 Jewish medical faculty members signed [a letter to the Temerty Faculty of Medicine](#) demanding the right to practice in an environment free of antisemitism and in which they did not have to hide their Zionism (see [this article](#) in the Toronto Star for details). In response, some medical learners and others on social media (at least one of whom was a McMaster-based graduate student) then started circulating a list of these doctors in order to identify them as Jewish/Zionist medical faculty members to avoid. Two other things happened shortly thereafter: (1) those 555 faculty members all began to receive letters letting them know that regulatory complaints were being submitted against them by a member of the public on the basis that being Zionist and against antisemitism was inherently racist; and (2) a new anonymous Twitter and Instagram account (not named here so as not to drive clicks, but still regularly active) announced that it was combing through the social media of all 555 signatories in order to find material to justify harassing them individually online. That account then started driving email campaigns (again to teaching hospitals, university departments, and the physician regulatory college) about those University of Toronto faculty members, with a different faculty member targeted almost daily. In addition to including a picture of the faculty member and describing where they work, these anonymous social media posts link to increasingly sophisticated automated email templates that members of the public can click on after reading wild claims about the hatefulness of tweets that support the continued existence of Israel, denounce Hamas, or decry antisemitism.

Initially some of the spurious charges of racism and Islamophobia were investigated, with a small number requiring legal involvement, and a climate of fear resulted in many Jewish faculty members coming off social media (deleting long-held professional accounts) and stopping any publicly advocacy against antisemitism. The anonymous account also started harassing Toronto-based faculty members outside the original 555 letter signatories; it is unclear how those were chosen, but some believe that they were identified for harassment as Jews by medical learners. Eventually the Toronto teaching hospitals and the Temerty Faculty of Medicine came to understand that this was all an antisemitic harassment campaign and began ignoring the complaint letters. The same anonymous accounts then started targeting faculty members (and occasionally senior medical learners such as residents and clinical fellows) at other Ontario universities, including University of Ottawa, Western University, and McMaster University. With the involvement of new hospitals and medical schools, the complaints again began to be investigated, lawyers again had to get involved, and advocacy efforts had to ramp up to explain to a new set of leaders what had by then already going on for months at other institutions. Most recently the harassment has returned to again primarily targeting Jewish faculty members at the University of Toronto.

In total this account has targeted dozens of Jewish faculty members and senior learners across Ontario. It has also targeted a small number of non-Jews who have taken particularly loud stances condemning antisemitism in Ontario and supporting their Jewish colleagues. There are also at least two non-anonymous physician social media accounts (one an Ontario medical faculty member and one a recent Ontario medical learner) that occasionally post calls to harass specific named Jewish medical faculty members and learners (including residents and medical

students) for standing up against antisemitism in medical education. All of this has resulted in a deluge of (vexatious) complaints about Jewish medical faculty members to the physician regulatory college (the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO)) in addition to the initial 555 complaints from late last year. None of these have been addressed as of yet – as far as the physicians know, all of those complaints are still pending, some since November 2023. While regulatory colleges are not campus entities, successful regulatory college complaints can have serious implications on the ability of a physician to maintain a faculty appointment, and the spectre of these complaints against a large number of faculty members is an ongoing faculty wellness issue.

Moreover, some Jewish medical faculty members who were targeted by this anonymous account then received death threats and other more targeted harassment/threats via hospital communication channels (generally in ways that made it obvious that they had been inspired by the anonymous social media postings). Almost all medical faculty members spend most of their time supervising learners in hospitals and clinics rather than in the medical school buildings, and those are the easiest places for them to be located based on the information posted by the anonymous account; some of those hospitals and clinics have had to invoke security measures to keep targeted Jewish faculty members (as well as their students, patients, and colleagues in their clinics and other workspaces) safe from harm. Targeted medical faculty members were thus generally advised to proactively inform their hospital's security team in case issues arose.

Other threats related to this harassment are more subtle. For example, all medical faculty members are regularly and anonymously evaluated by their clinical students for their teaching effectiveness and their ability to create a good learning environment. There have already been cases of these evaluations saying that their time with a clinician was fine but then referring to the online claims and making negative remarks about the harassed Jewish medical faculty member. There is substantial concern that, over time, the effects of this harassment, in combination with more general antisemitic attitudes, will result in systematically lower teaching effectiveness scores for Jewish medical faculty members which, over time, could result in Jewish medical faculty members being less likely to win awards, to get educational leadership positions, or to be promoted. Unfortunately, while Ontario Faculties of Medicine generally now ignore the vexatious complaint letters about their Jewish medical faculty members, there has been no open recognition by them that those faculty members are experiencing antisemitic harassment, and learners who echo the harassing comments are not corrected; this is in keeping with their general reluctance to name and to stand against antisemitism, generally for fear of experiencing backlash themselves.

In April 2024 some of these experiences were described in an article in the Toronto Star entitled [“It’s soul-destroying’: How a malevolent online campaign is targeting Jewish doctors in Ontario”](#). And still the harassment continues –it has now just become a fact of life for Jewish medical faculty members across Ontario. Some weigh any public declaration of being Jewish or Zionist where they might be recognized by someone outside the Jewish community – wearing a Star of David or a yellow hostage-support pin, being photographed attending a rally against antisemitism or a Jewish community event related to Israel – against the risk of ending up posted on that anonymous account or otherwise marked for harassment in a way that could threaten

their medical license or faculty appointment. The [Jewish Medical Association of Ontario \(JMAO\)](#), which has taken a lead role in supporting and in advocating for harassed Jewish medical faculty members (as well as other Jewish healthcare professional and learners experiencing antisemitism), does not list the names of any of its officers or board members on its website so they are less likely to be harassed. Even signing this brief is a risk – if it is posted publicly, the individual signing it on behalf of JMAO could be targeted for harassment. And yet we can no longer keep silent, and we can no longer live in fear.

Recommendation: It is time that our non-Jewish medical faculty colleagues and leaders (and Canadian leaders more generally), those who are inclined to be allies but are scared of the personal and professional repercussions of speaking out, be taught what we have learned as Jewish medical faculty members after almost eight months of aggressive harassment: If you stop being afraid and speak up for your colleagues and learners who are facing antisemitism, if you call out the bullies and harassers who are working so hard to silence us, you might get harassed yourself, and it might be awful for a while – but it will pass. And that is the only way the bullies won't win. This should be role-modeled and incentivized, not only in medical faculties but across higher education.

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Submitted by Dr Deron Brown on behalf of the Jewish Medical Association of Ontario (JMAO), a member of the Alliance Combatting Campus Antisemitism (ALCCA)