

Physicians for Human Rights

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://phr.org/our-work/resources/force-feeding-violates-basic-medical-ethics-and-our-core-values/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Donna McKay, MS on August 9, 2013

This post originally appeared in [The Huffington Post](#).

The recent [video by Yasiin Bey](#), actor and rapper formerly known as Mos Def, offers a powerful look into the harshness of force feeding [which some 45 Guantanamo detainees have been subjected to](#). In the video, Bey moans, gags, and finally pleads for the force feeding to end because he can't take it anymore. Even President Barack Obama [recently acknowledged the brutality of force feeding detainees](#) at Guantanamo by saying: "Is that the America we want to leave our children? Our sense of justice is stronger than that."

Force feeding violates longstanding medical ethics, is inhuman and degrading, and is against our fundamental values. The World Medical Association states that force feeding is "[never medically acceptable](#)," and the American Medical Association has said that it "[violates core ethical values of the medical profession](#)." A federal judge recently even called the procedure "[painful, humiliating, and degrading](#)." And a bipartisan taskforce found that force feeding is "[a form of abuse and must end](#)."

Force feeding is inconsistent with medical ethics, as it directly infringes on detainees' rights to make their own decisions about their health. Health professionals at Guantanamo have been subjecting detainees to the procedure against their wishes, using shackles and restraints for up to four hours a day while force feeding them. Medical professionals who administer force feeding at Guantanamo are violating their clinical and ethical responsibilities, and instead should use their independent medical judgment, respond to the detainees' needs and wishes, and stop using force.

Everyone's reaction to force feeding is not as strong as Bey's; others find it uncomfortable, at worst. As one of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) medical experts [recently pointed out](#), for some, force feeding is extremely painful, while others eventually get used to it. The procedure can be particularly painful in situations like Guantanamo, where detainees are likely to resist. But regardless of varying reactions to the procedure, health professionals and leading medical groups from around the world unequivocally call to immediately end the force feeding of detainees.

While force feeding is a major problem and the president's administration needs to stop the practice, we have to remember that it's only a part of the ongoing crisis at Guantanamo Bay. One piece of good news is that a [Senate hearing](#) took place just last month on the larger topic of closing Guantanamo where a PHR medical expert, Brigadier General (Ret.) Stephen Xenakis, [testified](#) and said, "Force-feeding completely undermines the physician-patient relationship by destroying the trust that is essential for all clinical treatment."

The detainees have engaged in a hunger strike as a way to express their longstanding and legitimate grievances resulting from their deplorable conditions, including solitary confinement, indefinite detention, and torture. PHR has documented the serious physical and psychological consequences of indefinite detention and the devastating effects of solitary confinement. The detainees' drastic measures represent an act of desperation, and the solution is not to violate medical standards and compromise our core values, but rather to address the appalling conditions they have been subjected to for over a decade.

No human being should ever have to endure such treatment. Everyone deserves to either be released or charged and tried in a court of law. No one should linger for years in detention without charge, losing all faith in our justice system.

As a nation, we must do better. We must respect everyone's human rights, including those of detainees in our custody and care. Holding people in detention indefinitely violates American values and our country's core principles of justice and fairness.

Enter a valid email address

Invalid email address

Success!

Physicians for Human Rights 2022