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### VIEWPOINT

#### A Call to Commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27, in All Health Science Schools

Matthew K. Wynia, MD, MPH and William S. Silvers, MD

##### Abstract

This viewpoint proposes why and how Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27, should be honored in all health professions schools. A public letter, from which this viewpoint is adapted, has been endorsed by over 50 teachers of medicine, ethics, and history.

Learning about the **role of health professionals** in the Holocaust is critical to understanding contemporary bioethics. Yet, in recent years, only 22 of 140 North American medical schools (16%) required any teaching of this history.<sup>1</sup>

There are several reasons for this omission, but we believe the barriers can be overcome by an international initiative encouraging every health science school to commemorate the tragic legacy of health professionals' involvement in the Holocaust on the date of the liberation of Auschwitz, January 27, International Holocaust Remembrance Day. First, accreditors do not require that health sciences schools teach about the history of health professional involvement in the Holocaust, and health science curricula are already very tight. But an annual commemorative event is a nominal request and would reduce conflicts about appropriating existing curricular time. Second, the Holocaust was a uniquely medically driven genocide and its lessons are sensitive, complex, and **difficult to teach**; as a result, few faculty members are proficient teachers of this history and its lessons for today. But a once-a-year commemorative event means that schools would need to find just a single speaker per year capable of addressing this subject matter. Third, although lectures in health sciences training programs have given way to case-based discussions, the core historical facts about health professional involvement in the Holocaust require some didactic content delivery. Fortunately, guest lectures as special events remain popular, and a further pragmatic consideration is that an annual commemoration lecture of this type has the potential benefit of drawing the interest of donors who might not otherwise contribute to health sciences programs.

Of course, there are drawbacks to this idea, including that an annual commemorative event does not comprise a full curriculum on this complex and important history and its contemporary implications. Ideally, a commemorative event would spark additional opportunities for learning and reflection. There is also a possibility, if every school were

to adopt the idea immediately, that there might be an excess demand for the limited supply of effective lecturers all on the same day. But the experiences of several schools in developing commemorative programs for International Holocaust Remembrance Day suggest that an annual event can be supported through philanthropic gifts and is an effective starting point for teaching, reflecting on, and instilling lessons from this critical history for health professionals today.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

### References

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**Matthew K. Wynia, MD, MPH** is a professor of medicine and public health at the University of Colorado School of Medicine in Aurora and the director of the University of Colorado's Center for Bioethics and Humanities, located on the Anschutz Medical Campus.

**William S. Silvers, MD** is a clinical professor of medicine at the University of Colorado School of Medicine in Aurora and a faculty affiliate at the University of Colorado Center for Bioethics and Humanities at the Anschutz Medical Campus. He is also the founder of the Holocaust Genocide Contemporary Bioethics Program at the University of Colorado Center for Bioethics and Humanities.

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