

Letters

To the Editors:

Say 'No' to shackling prisoners in hospital

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The sight that greeted me on entering the ward for my routine post-operative ward round was detestable. The patient in the first bed, who had just been returned from the operating theatre after a transurethral resection of the prostate, had a fetter binding his left ankle to the bed. Reasoning with the prison guard proved futile, and I reproved sharply, insisting that the shackle be removed immediately. He complied. Next morning, I was flabbergasted to see the same patient shackled. Once again the shackle was taken off with reluctance after a severe reprimand. The day after, I had to single-handedly face a barrage from the prison and health department high-ups. However, on this human rights issue I did not budge. To date, I am happy to say that

as a consultant I have always refused to treat shackled patients.

In a *BMJ* editorial Richard Smith appealed to the medical fraternity not to treat shackled patients: "Understandably doctors unused to treating prisoners in NHS hospitals are not sure about the 'rules'. But they should be. Doctors should simply refuse to treat patients who are shackled, and doctors' organisations should support them without quibble. This is the State making doctors participate in unethical acts" (1).

Reference

1. Smith R. Don't treat shackled patients. *British Medical Journal* 1997; **314**: 164.

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