

Editor — Your report of the release of a British physician, Dr. Sheila Cassidy, from a Chilean prison after being tortured highlights a number of issues of interest to the medical community.

Ample evidence accumulated by Amnesty International documents indicates an increasing use of torture against prisoners throughout many countries of the world. The Chilean Junta, as verified by a number of responsible bodies including a United Nations Commission, has been particularly vicious toward its prisoners, a practice that continues to the present day and to which Dr. Cassidy can attest by her personal experience.

Physicians become involved in torture in a number of ways, both as perpetrators and as victims. Twenty three physicians were convicted at Nuremberg for their role in the torture of prisoners. Seven were hanged. Evidence exists that physicians sometimes bear some responsi-

bility for mistreatment of prisoners even today, as for example in psychiatric hospitals in the Soviet Union. The California Medical Association has recently passed a resolution urging physicians to avoid any complicity in torture.

More closely related to the Cassidy case is the ethical dilemma facing the physician who is asked to treat a fugitive from the law. When it is clear that reporting such an encounter will inevitably lead to imprisonment without hope of due process and almost certain torture, (the current situation in Chile) then the physician must make the difficult choice between obedience to the law and to the ethical code that binds his relationship to his patients. In my opinion, Dr. Cassidy made the right decision and deserves commendation.

There may be those who would argue otherwise, but certainly no one can condone the brutal treatment meted out to Dr. Cassidy herself. I would urge all readers to lodge protests with the Chilean Ambassador in Washington regarding the continued use of torture by his government.

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