

INTRODUCTION TO THE *USA-P MHN* AND TO THE PANEL

By Rebecca Fadil LCSW

Presented as part of the forum, “Voices on Palestine,” sponsored by the *USA-Palestine Mental Health Network* in New York City on June 15, 2018

Welcome, everyone.

Before we begin, I'd like to offer a little background describing how a Palestine mental health network materialized here in the USA.

I have friends and family on both sides of the green line, so Palestine has always been a natural topic of conversation for me. But I quickly learned that when you talk about Palestine in mental health circles you get a predictable response—ranging from awkward silence to outright hostility. The response marks the topic as out of bounds for any decent human being; the effect (whether intentional or unintentional) has been one of censorship.

Censorship of the subject of Palestine has become such a common theme that we began to see the need for an instrument of legitimacy in the mental health community—some kind of organization—that said, “we are mental health workers and the mental health of Palestinians is a valid area of discussion.”

We looked around and discovered that such an organization already existed. *The UK-Palestine Mental Health Network* was founded by the London-based psychoanalyst Dr. Martin Kemp in 2014. We're grateful to Dr. Kemp and the UK group for being generous mentors to us in the USA, helping the *USA-Palestine Mental Health Network* to get off the ground in 2016--along with support from the East Jerusalem-based psychiatrist Samah Jabr MD, and later the assistance of Alice Rothchild MD with the *Jewish Voice for Peace*.

The mission of the *USA-P MHN* is simple: to draw attention to the impact of the Israeli occupation of Palestine on the mental health of both Palestinians and Israelis. Our founding and Steering Committee members

are myself, Christine Schmidt, a psychoanalyst here in New York City, and Elizabeth Berger MD, a child psychiatrist also based in New York.

Before I introduce our first speakers, I need to please ask that we all be discreet about what we see and hear today, and that no last names are used or photographs taken. As you may know, it's difficult for human rights workers to get into Israel if their identities are known. This fact poses a challenge for many people and constitutes one reason why hosting a conference in Israel is problematic. Many of us have been detained at the airport for hours, had our luggage confiscated, have been strip searched, and—in the cases of some individuals--have been denied entry to the country and deported. These humiliations are intentional and are meant to discourage human rights workers from coming into the country and documenting the abuse.

Having said that, let us welcome our panel and look forward to an open discussion immediately following the panel.