

This address was given by Dr Rochy Miller at Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital on Monday, 17 May 2021, to launch the exhibition "Registered, Persecuted, Annihilated". The exhibition was brought from the German Association for Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics (DGPPN) in conjunction with the Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Topography of Terror Foundation in Berlin.

The exhibition was hosted by the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and co-hosted and supported by the TJ Ryan Foundation, the Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies, the Gandel Foundation, the Queensland Museum and The University of Queensland.

Dr Rochy Miller is the daughter of a Holocaust survivor. She is a retired medical doctor and writer. In addition to her medical qualifications she has studied creative writing, holds both Medical Journalism and Master of Journalism degrees, is the author of a series of widely used text books in the field of aesthetics education, and has recently published her first book – *“Not Just a Survivor – a Portrait of my Mother”* – a memoir of her mother's story.

MEDICAL ETHICS IN THE SHADE OF THE HOLOCAUST

My address is written from the viewpoint of three separate personas:

- as a member of the Jewish community;
- as a medical doctor;
- and as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor.

And this exhibition has raised in each of those personas, different responses, and different perspectives.

- My response as a member of the Jewish community, is **abhorrence**. Here is more evidence of the atrocious behaviour that Hitler and his associates carried out in their quest for a perfect Aryan race – irrespective of the impact against anyone outside of the chosen elite – whether it was elimination of Jews, or the mentally ill. But Jewish patients during this time were doubly endangered – they were persecuted both as Jews and due to their illnesses and disabilities.
- From the perspective of a medical doctor, I am **ashamed**. I feel a profound shame that colleagues of our noble profession were participants in behaviour so contrary not only to medical ethics, but to the moral obligation of being human. And furthermore, that they were so willing for so long not only to participate, and facilitate, but to deny that this atrocity occurred. Not only did they ignore immoral behaviour that often enabled them,

or their colleagues to perhaps even benefit from its implementation – but more damning – that it occurred primarily due to their complicity.

- And finally, as a daughter, whose Holocaust-survivor mother had spent her entire post-Holocaust life seeking answers as to how this apocalypse could happen, I feel **anger**. Anger that a whole nation, capitulating on the pretext of scientific theory, and under the bombardment of propaganda, could collectively move from caring about others to an obsessive caring of only self – albeit a national self – and by so doing, empower the actuality of the Holocaust.

This exhibition has added one more glimmer of insight into the obscene landscape of pre-Holocaust Germany – an extra little piece of clarity in the incomprehensible puzzle of the collective psyche of Nazi Germany.

It clarifies, for me, the paradigm shift of an entire civilized, sophisticated and educated society, bending to the will of a depraved political regime.

This was a society that no longer felt it had an obligation to individuals. All the policies in place to protect the health and well-being of individual citizens were usurped into policies that would benefit the nation's health and productivity.

Instead of protecting the weakest members of society, the weak were earmarked for elimination so that the strong could become even stronger. Under this guise, it became acceptable to alienate

Jewish colleagues, to isolate those who did not fit the state's quest for perfection. Under this guise, it became acceptable – indeed expected – that medical personnel abused and killed vast numbers of their patients, people who came to them for medical help.

From a document produced by the German Association for Psychiatry, entitled *Remembrance and Responsibility*, the following quote elucidates just how far-reaching the impact of this political affiliation was:

“Without the initiative and support of psychiatrists and other doctors, the national socialist “euthanasia” program could not have been implemented.” (Schneider 2021)

At every step, the medical community should have been seeing red flags. With every new law, or decree, humanitarians should have been protesting.

But German society was under the collective spell of “economic policy”, becoming increasingly focused on eugenics and “racial hygiene”. And with this national emphasis, they moved seamlessly from healers to killers, from rescuers to perpetrators.

Incomprehensible. Inexcusable. But – like all the other incomprehensible and inexcusable atrocities of the Holocaust – **it happened.**

This exhibition came about as an apology. Seventy years after the events, the psychiatry association took responsibility for the actions of their predecessors and apologized for them.

However important it is to acknowledge the horrors of history, there is an even more important role – to prepare us against recurrences in the future. In a time where economic policy underpins everything, where government control of health is juggled with the almighty dollar, where health decisions are mooted against the perceived mutual benefit of the community – we need to know there are ironclad safeguards to protect the most vulnerable among us.

Medical ethics at the time of the Holocaust crumbled under the weight of political enthusiasm. Policy that may have started out sounding economically rational and socially plausible soon degenerated when the value of individual human lives got undermined and swept away in the idealistic fervor that turned a blind eye to real people – people of different races, people of different ages, people with different abilities, people with different physical and mental health.

By illuminating the conflicts between the rights and obligations of the individual and the rights and obligation of the state in the past, it accentuates the importance of infallible safeguards to protect all of us as individuals in the future – whatever that future brings.

This exhibition is one more tool – one more insight – that keeps us actively seeking to learn from the past. To ensure that this, like all the other incomprehensible and inexcusable Holocaust atrocities, never happens again.

Schneider, F. (2021). 'Psychiatry in the time of National Socialism.' German Association for Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics. <https://www.dgppn.de/en/Core-areas/psychiatry-in-time-of-National-Socialism.html> (accessed 25 May 2021).

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