

From [The New York Times](#) | Original Article

Disturbing new questions have been raised about the role of doctors and other medical professionals in helping the Central Intelligence Agency subject terrorism suspects to harsh treatment, abuse and torture.

The Red Cross previously documented, from interviews with “high-value” prisoners, that medical personnel helped facilitate abuses in the C.I.A.’s “enhanced interrogation program” during the Bush administration. Now Physicians for Human Rights [has suggested](#) that the medical professionals may also have violated national and international laws setting limits on what research can be performed on humans.

The physicians’ group, which is based in Cambridge, Mass., analyzed a wide range of previously released government documents and reports, many of them heavily censored. It found that the Bush administration used medical personnel — including doctors, psychologists and physician assistants — to help justify acts that had long been classified by law and treaty as illegal or unethical and to redefine them as safe, legal and effective when used on terrorism suspects.

[The group’s report](#) focused particularly on a few issues where medical personnel played an important role — determining how far a harsh interrogation could go, providing legal cover against prosecution and designing future interrogation procedures. The actual monitoring data are not publicly available, but the group was able to deduce from the guidelines governing the program what role the health professionals played, assuming they followed the rules.

In the case of waterboarding, a technique in which prisoners are brought to the edge of drowning, health professionals were required to monitor the practice and keep detailed medical records. Their findings led to several changes, including a switch to saline solution as the near-drowning agent instead of water, ostensibly to protect the health of detainees who ingest large volumes of liquid but also, the group says, to allow repeated use of waterboarding on the same subject.

Another government memorandum concluded from medical observations on 25 detainees that combining several techniques — say a face slap with water dousing or a stress kneeling position — caused no more pain than when the techniques were used individually. That was used to justify the application of multiple techniques at the same time.

The group concludes that health professionals who facilitated these practices were in essence conducting research and experimentation on human subjects. The main purposes of such research, the group says, were to determine how to use various techniques, to calibrate the levels of pain and to create a legal basis for defending interrogators from potential prosecution under antitorture laws. The interrogators could claim that they had acted in good faith in accord with medical judgments of safety and had not intended to inflict extreme suffering.

The report from the physicians' group does not prove its case beyond doubt — how could it when so much is still hidden? — but it rightly calls on the White House and Congress to investigate the potentially illegal human experimentation and whether those who authorized or conducted it should be punished. Those are just two of the many unresolved issues from the Bush administration that President Obama and Congressional leaders have swept under the carpet.