

House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Hearing on Holocaust Survivor Care Needs  
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Prepared and Submitted by Barbara Paris, MD

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch and members of the subcommittee.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak before you today.

" Doctor, I cannot sleep because every time I close my eyes, I am in Auschwitz". During each home visit to my demented elderly patient those were her words. I cannot get them out of my head.

Can you, Committee members, imagine the trauma of a child, a teenager, a parent being brutally shoved into a cattle car, with no air, no bathroom and no food for days? At that was just the beginning. Lined up for hours in the bitter cold with no shoes or coats, shaved heads, smelling the burning bodies of there loved in the crematoria.

I am privileged, as a physician whose career has been devoted to caring for survivors and their family members, to provide a few important observations. Time does not permit me to adequately address the multitude of obstacles that currently prevent Holocaust survivors from receiving the resources and care they need for dignity in their final years. By this I refer to everything from the simple failure of Germany to acknowledge and commit to providing to address all survivors' physical and emotional needs, to the horrific maze of opaque guidelines and ludicrous paperwork demands and deadlines imposed by Germany and the Claims Conference in various programs.

Does the German Government really need to spend their money interviewing anyone who could possibly survive Hitler's dehumanization, torture, rape, medical experiments, starvation and death marches to determine if they have been psychologically and physically harmed enough to deserve reparations? Even when the German psychiatrist acknowledges damage, these patients are not physically or emotionally capable of completing highly formalistic, complicated and overly bureaucratic correspondence requiring yearly physician input, notarization and more. As a physician, I am challenged to complete forms written in German and asking for a level of detail about past events that I cannot ascertain from a demented patient and for other patients it is traumatizing to have to relive these details and be forced to " re-justify" their right to reparations every year. It is a clever way of withholding money from disabled people.

Thankfully, many survivors are well in their nineties and I have the honor and the privilege to be their doctor. While they have exhibited tremendous vitality in building new lives and families in America, they sublimated their losses into flawed parent - child relationships, night terrors, and silently replayed their living hell to themselves. One second generation survivor poignantly told me, "although I did not realize this a child, I understand now that the holocaust was playing out in our living room everyday." Make no mistake, every survivor suffers from PTSD. The German government needs to face this crystal clear fact and act upon it."

The medical definition of PTSD is as follows;

A disorder that occurs when a person has 'experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others,' and " the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror." It is characterized by repeated reliving of the life-threatening events in the form of images, thoughts, illusions, flashbacks, dreams or hallucinations.

A close professional colleague has been studying aging survivors in Jerusalem since 1990 and comparing them to non-survivors of the same age residing in Jerusalem. Survivors are less educated, have fewer social supports, greater difficulties with activities of daily living and greater usage of psychiatric medications. This is not surprising and must be addressed. Aging survivors, with time and fewer activities to occupy their day are back in the ghettos and concentration camps, grieving for their dead relatives, hiding food in their beds, depressed that they survived, afraid of doctors, fearful of acknowledging weakness (that was an automatic death sentence) anxious about showers, standing on line, wearing ID bracelets and lots more.

We need resources to manage them in comforting environments designed NOT to trigger these fears. Only now, in their retirement, and facing death of spouses and friends are they beginning to uncover these painful suppressed memories and grieve the death of their own parents, sisters and brothers. For these survivors the year is 1946, not 2014. All Doctors and other health care providers and caregivers are not educated in the unique skill sets needed to respectfully and compassionately help survivors live their final year in relative peace. Caring for survivors really requires fully trained health care professionals who understand this unique population's emotional and medical needs. Well-intended but not well-informed or funded programs that give the appearance of assistance really just divert attention from the vast gulf that exists between survivors' needs and available resources and programs.

What about their children? Most second-generation survivors and their therapists do not understand this trans-generational effect of trauma on their own emotional difficulties including failed interpersonal relationships, depression, and anxiety. Schizophrenia and much more. Their parents, depleted of psychological resources, were often emotionally detached but simultaneously feared any separation from their children in suffocating ways.

One frustrated, lawyer son of survivors tells me" the reparations program totally ignores emotional/mental scarring and financial needs of the offspring of survivors. Growing up in a home with a parent who was incapable of nurturing her children, led me to many years of psychotherapy- yet the Germans refuse to acknowledge any causal connection or obligation to reimburse my therapy expenses. In fact, they exhibited a rigid myopic notion that insisted that the effects of the Holocaust were not passed on to children of survivors, or even if there was some "leakage", Germany maintains that it has no obligation to compensate or assist members of that "select" offspring group.

I am continuously frustrated and bewildered by grandiose announcements from Germany and the Claims Conference concerning new benefit programs. Have they ever taken a measure of the full scope of the needs and simply decided that Germany will now and going forward pay what is needed? Why not? This applies to last year's home care fund announcement, which will fall far short of meeting the actual home care needs of survivors, as well as this month's announcement for child survivors.

I ask you, committee members, how much can \$3280 cover in expenses for child survivors?

I set of dentures? I set of hearing aides? Six weeks of a 24-hour home attendant? Home visits with an occupational therapist, a medical doctor, psychiatrist or social worker? Bereavement counseling? Medication costs? Transportation costs? It does not even make a dent in addressing their medical and psychological needs. AMCHA, the National Center for Psychosocial Support of Survivors of the Holocaust and the Second Generation has developed a rich body of unique knowledge in the late effects of Holocaust traumatization and its intergenerational transmission. Resources are needed to implement the wide range of therapies that AMCHA has been utilizing to treat these victims.

The financial needs for care, resources, and education of caregivers and health care providers are many. We must advocate for our citizens who came here physically and emotionally spent, yet managed to rebuild their lives at great personal cost. We must not ignore or minimize their needs and the needs of their offspring. I am very honored to have this opportunity to spell out for the Congress a small part of what the problem is. I struggle daily to creatively piecemeal together and coordinate the far too few resources that can help provide a modicum of relief. The survivors and their families are running out of time, truly. They are depending on this Committee and Congress to step in where others have failed, and use your powers as the elected officials of our country to demand that Germany and other responsible institutions step up and finally do what is morally necessary. You have the power to help. Thank you.