

On March 23, 2007 the Center for Human Rights and International Justice hosted at Conversations at Lunch Dr. Michael Grodin, Co-Director of the Boston Center for Refugee Health and Human Rights at Boston Medical Center, which is a multidisciplinary center that provides services for refugees and survivors of torture and related trauma. Dr. Grodin is also a Professor of Health Law, Bioethics & Human Rights Health Law, Bioethics & Human Rights at Boston University School of Public Health.

Grodin expressed the importance of collaborative efforts and multidisciplinary approaches to complex issues of human rights as embodied in the Center for Refugee Health and Human Rights by citing an African proverb, “If you put enough spiderwebs together, you can catch an elephant.” The Center for Refugee Health and Human Rights provides primary health care, mental health services, referrals for medical specialties and neuro-psychiatric evaluation, dental evaluations, evaluations of persons in detention, physical therapy, legal services, social services, English classes, creative therapies, and vocational rehabilitation. The Center also offers a clothing bank, access to the BMC Food Pantry, and ethnic community support groups. Grodin noted that he has found that the Center’s dental program is especially important to clients not only because the mouth is a portal for sustenance, but damage to teeth can also be a reminder of torture every time they open their mouth. He told a story of a psychiatry patient who smiled for the first time in therapy after getting dentures, underscoring the importance of primary health and mental health care working in tandem. Dr. Grodin also noted that he sees many patients in their primary care clinic because of cultural issues regarding psychology and therapy.

Clients to the Center come from a variety of sources, including referral by lawyers, other groups, and through the health system. Fifty-nine percent of patients are

foreign-born, and of those 70% of the women and 30% of the men have been raped. The Center's research includes that on sexual trauma, as well as traditional healing and integration and secondary trauma of lawyers and interpreters representing survivors of human rights abuses. In particular researchers have published a paper on male rape, female pelvic pain (often associated with rape), and produced a culturally sensitive video on pelvic exams. The Center also writes forensic affidavits and does psychiatric evaluations for asylum cases. Ninety-five percent for the clinic's cases are granted asylum. In addition, the Center has prepared a manual for preparing people for their court appearances.

The Center's current challenges include lack of funding, the increasing use of torture post-9/11, increasing financial strain on hospitals, maintaining staff, and obtaining foundational support. For more information on the Center and its work see www.bcrhhr.org.