

Fighting sectarian aberrations in the health sector

Speakers: **Joséphine CESBRON**, President, National Union of Associations for the Defense of Families and Individuals Victims of cults – UNADFI | France; **Philippe DENORMANDIE**, Medical Advisor MNH; Agency for Complementary and Alternative Medicine – A-MCA | France; **Hanène ROMDHANE**, Judge, Interministerial Mission of Vigilance and Combat against Sectarian aberrations – MIVILUDES France

Led by: **Benoît GALLET**, Advisor, Administrator Institute of Medicine and Applied Epidemiology | France

The Inter-ministerial Mission of Vigilance and Combat against Sectarian Aberrations (IMVCSD) defines sectarian aberrations as a deviation from freedom of conscience of each citizen that undermines public order but also fundamental rights of individuals for security and integrity. In the field of health, the IMVCSD is competent to handle these abuses. Sectarian aberrations consist in mental control of a patient that obeys all advice and interventions of the therapist. The “carer” uses the patient’s suffering and anxiety to put pressure on him/her in order that he/she accepts the healing principles proposed and abandons the care proposed by conventional medicine.

According to IMVCSD, non-conventional healing practices are care methods that are not scientifically validated because they are not taught in the health professionals’ curricula. Even though all non-conventional therapies are not sectarian aberrations, the latter exist when unnecessary treatment that can damage patients’ health are being proposed even when there is no overt mental control.

The number of sectarian aberrations in the field of health is increasing since Covid 19’s confinements

Sectarian aberrations are a major health threat that the Ministry of Health must address to protect public health. Over the last years, sectarian aberrations have not always been taken into consideration as the Covid-19 crisis has been the priority for the Ministry of Health. There has been an increase in referrals to the IMVCSD for health-related issues as more and more people make use of the internet to ask questions without checking the reliability of the source. Therefore, there has been an increasing number of victims of abuse. The lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic have also contributed to the increase of requests for action to IMVCSD.

Mental frailty increases as the healing of the patient appears to vanish: the patient continues to fight but looks for solutions outside conventional medicine and might be subject to sectarian aberrations.

Measures implemented to address sectarian aberrations

There are precautionary measures that can be taken which need common action between healthcare professionals and competent authorities in order to reduce the number of requests. Following the rule of law, France does not aim at depriving patients from their freedom but, rather, aims at training them so that their consent for therapeutic care is free from undue influence. Symptom treatments, pain or even side effects of medical treatments can encourage patients to look for alternative solutions. Unfortunately, without help or warning, they face many therapeutic alternatives, whether legal or illegal, and do not know how to evaluate them.

Additionally, appropriate regulation has to be adopted with regard to the training of those “therapists” in order to clarify their roles and limits. For instance, on “doctolib” or “médoucine”, patients can easily find practitioners proposing conventional and non-conventional therapies, some of which are not validated by the Ministry of Health. These therapies are sometimes named complementary medicine, alternative medicine, or non-conventional medicine. Common definition and terms are necessary to facilitate everyone’s understanding of the issue.