

I am a board-certified family physician, a wife, a mother of three children ages 2, 5, and 8, [and] a captain in the U.S. Army Reserve Medical Corps.... I am refusing orders to be an accomplice in what I consider an immoral, inhumane and unconstitutional act, namely an offensive military mobilization in the Middle East. My oath as a citizen-soldier to defend the Constitution, my oath as a physician to preserve life and prevent disease, and my responsibility as a human being to the preservation of this planet, would be violated if I cooperate with Operation Desert Shield....

I had hoped that we as the people had learned the lessons of Vietnam -- 50,000 Americans dead, hundreds of thousands of civilian dead -- and environmental disaster. What we face in the Middle East is death and destruction on a grander scale....

The majority of casualties will be civilians.... Neither the U.S. military nor the Allied forces possess adequate medical facilities to respond to such medical needs. From a medical point of view the public has been misled concerning the catastrophic nature of wounds and injuries that will befall combatants and civilians.

As a doctor I know that where there can be no medical cure, prevention is the only remedy. I, therefore, commit my medical knowledge and training to this effort to avert war by refusing orders to participate in Operation Desert Shield.

I consider myself a patriot and have taken these actions in support of American troops who have been deployed in the Gulf region, in support of the American people, and in support of the children both here and in the Middle East who have no voice. I hope that in some small way my act of conscience will help promote a peaceful resolution of the Gulf crisis.

*Yolanda Huet-Vaughn, M.D.  
January 9, 1991*

## What Can We Do Now?

- Write letters to newspapers and journals. Write to your Senators and Representative in Congress. Let them know that you're against the draft and that you'll resist if they try to draft you.
- Educate yourself about the draft. Inform your co-workers. Organize a forum or discussion on the medical draft at your workplace, home, or school. Think about what you will do if you are drafted.
- Tell your patients, friends, and neighbors. Encourage professional associations and unions to take a stand against the wars and the draft, and not to collaborate with the Selective Service System.
- Organize an anti-war, anti-draft, or draft resistance group. (During the 1990-1991 Gulf War, peace groups formed at many hospitals, clinics, and medical and nursing schools.)
- Join in collective expressions of your commitment to resist the draft. (During the 1990-1991 Gulf War, hundreds of health care workers signed a joint health care workers' pledge to resist militarism and the draft.)
- Join with others -- young people, students, parents, veterans, etc. -- to oppose any draft. Get involved in anti-war and anti-draft coalitions.

**Resistance now can prevent the draft and help bring the wars to a quicker, less bloody end!**



MedicalDraft.info

*This leaflet and more are at:  
<http://www.medicaldraft.info>  
Updated May 2011.*

# Health Care Workers and the Draft

**If you think the draft is just for young men, *think again*. The first people to be drafted will probably be health care workers.**

**If you're a doctor, nurse, technician, therapist, or other medical professional -- man or woman, age 20 through 44 -- and if Congress authorizes a draft, you could be in boot camp in just a few months.**

**This leaflet explains how a medical draft is likely to work, what you can do now if you don't want to be drafted, and why we hope you'll join us in draft resistance.**



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## Will There Be A Draft of Health Care Workers?

The peacetime U.S. Army doesn't have very many doctors, nurses, or medical technicians. Most of those in the military are in the Reserves, subject to call-up for indefinite active duty at any time. In December 2004, the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had created a severe shortage of military surgeons: "Many surgeons have been on a second deployment or an extended deployment, and even this has not been sufficient. Planners are having to contemplate pressing surgeons into yet a third deployment." But it's politically difficult to keep reservists on active duty indefinitely, and extended call-ups of Reservists make other potential new Reservists less willing to sign up.

The military can't fight wars without doctors. During past wars there was a special "Doctor Draft" with a higher age limit and fewer deferments. In 1987, Congress ordered the Selective Service System to prepare contingency plans for a compulsory "Health Care Personnel Delivery System". Selective Service published its plans for public comment on August 15, 1989 (54 *Federal Register* 33644-33654; also on our Web site at [www.MedicalDraft.info](http://www.MedicalDraft.info)), and has had them ready ever since.

As soon as Congress authorizes a draft of health care workers, Selective Service is ready to finalize the regulations, put them into effect, and begin sending out induction notices. The concept underwent field exercises in 1998-1999, and Selective Service believes that "HCPDS is a sound, workable program."

Even those who claim there won't be a general draft admit that a medical draft is more likely, and will be "needed" by the military sooner, than a general draft of young men.

According to one military doctor, writing in a 2004 medical journal article explaining Selective Service plans, "A physician draft is the most likely conscription into the military in the near future.... Currently, this ["special skills"] mission is only for health care personnel, but in the future it is foreseeable it may include linguists, environmental engineers, computer specialists, and other professions. "

As the wars and the casualties continue and escalate, a medical draft could start in a hurry. Draft registration probably won't be needed: In the past, the AMA arranged to provide licensing lists to Selective Service, and Congress will probably require other professional and licensing boards to do likewise.

Congress could approve a draft any day. Health care workers need to start thinking now about what they'll do if they are drafted -- and what they can do now to prevent the draft.

Many health care workers object to being forced to serve in the military. People go into health care careers because they care about saving lives. But military medical workers are supposed to patch up wounded soldiers, so that they can go back to the front to fight (and perhaps kill) other soldiers. Some doctors don't think that's what their Hippocratic Oath to preserve life is all about. During the 1990-1991 Gulf War, some active-duty and Reserve doctors refused orders to the Gulf, and civilian health care workers began preparing for a draft and organized a health care workers' pledge against militarism and the draft.

## Who Will Be Drafted?

Much will be up to Congress. Selective Service has complete standby plans for a medical draft that could start tomorrow. But it would need permission from Congress, and the authorizing legislation could require changes in those plans.

Congress could decide not to include women in the medical draft. But it will be hard to get enough nurses and other professionals in some specialties without drafting women. A health care workers' draft will most likely include women.

Congress could specify which occupations would be included. It will probably leave it up to the President, who will probably leave it up to the Pentagon. In 1986, when Congress last debated a medical draft, the proposal allowed the President to designate for inclusion any "health-care occupations that are essential to the Armed Forces and in which personnel may not be available to meet the needs of the Armed Forces".

Selective Service has said it is prepared to draft people "professionally qualified" in 57 medical and related specialties, including physicians, dentists, psychologists, therapists, dietitians, technicians, nurses, veterinarians, pharmacists, opticians, "other medical care and treatment personnel", and "miscellaneous allied specialists".

Past Congressional proposals would have authorized a draft of medical workers ages 20 through 54, but Selective Service has said that "requirements would likely be met" by those 20 through 44. The youngest would be drafted first. Since few physicians are 20 years old, significantly older people could be drafted in at least some fields.

As with current contingency plans for a general draft, health care workers who are drafted will have only 10 days to report for induction or to make any claim for deferment or exemption. If you don't want to be drafted, you should plan ahead. If you think you might qualify for deferment or exemption, see a draft counselor now. If you want to lobby against the draft, do it now. If you plan to resist, say so now.

## What Can I Do If I Don't Want to Be Drafted?

You could be drafted if you're a U.S. citizen or resident licensed in a health care profession. (Both U.S. citizens residing abroad, and foreigners residing in the U.S., are subject to the U.S. draft.) You can avoid the draft by renouncing your citizenship and leaving the U.S., or by leaving your profession -- now, before you are drafted. Not much of a choice unless you're already planning to leave.

You could just hope to get lucky. Depending on your age and your specialty, you might not be drafted at all. Unless you want to gamble with your life, you should make some other plan as well.

You'll have to take a physical exam, but anyone "practicing their profession in the private sector" will be automatically "considered able to do the same in a military environment, notwithstanding physical conditions which would cause rejection as a regular registrant."

You could apply for a deferment or exemption, but most people don't qualify for any. Selective Service proposes to defer those who convince draft boards that they are "engaged in direct patient care ... essential to the health care within their own communities." But no one knows just what this will mean in practice, or can count on such a deferment.

Those who qualify as conscientious objectors (COs) don't have to fight. But you're a CO only if you oppose all wars (not just certain ones), for religious or moral (not political) reasons, and if you can convince your draft board your beliefs are deep and sincere. Many COs serve as medics; health care COs will have to explain why they object to such military medical duty. If they succeed, they'll have to do alternative service -- possibly in a civilian hospital handling overflow military patients.

Refusal to register has been extremely effective in preventing a draft of young men. But health care workers probably won't get the chance to refuse to register. Your first word from Selective Service will probably be an induction notice. Once you get it, there is no safe or easy way out.

**The easiest, safest, and potentially most effective actions you can take to avoid being drafted are those you can take now to prevent the draft. If there's enough resistance now, no one will be drafted.**