



## Medical Professionals Denounce “Rectal Feeding” as “Sexual Assault Masquerading as Medical Treatment”

The Senate Torture Report revealed that CIA medical officers subjected at least five detainees to “rectal rehydration” and “rectal feeding.” The report indicates the rectal procedures were done without evidence of medical necessity, but rather as a means of behavior control. Leading medical experts denounced this practice not only as medically unwise, but as torture.

- “For all practical purposes, it’s never used. No one in the United States is hydrating anybody through their rectum. Nobody is feeding anybody through their rectum.”  
*Thomas Burke, MD, Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine, Harvard Medical School; Attending Physician, Massachusetts General Hospital*
- “In over 30 years of gastroenterology practice I never used rectal hydration. Also, rectal feeding simply doesn’t make physiologic sense. The colon cannot absorb even pureed food.”  
*Steven Field, MD, Clinical Asst. Professor of Medicine, New York University School of Medicine*
- “Contrary to the CIA’s assertions, there is no clinical indication to use rectal rehydration and feeding over oral or intravenous administration of fluids and nutrients. This is a form of sexual assault masquerading as medical treatment. In the absence of medical necessity, it is clear that the only purpose behind this humiliating and invasive procedure is to inflict physical and mental pain.”<sup>1</sup>  
*Vincent Iacopino, MD, Senior Medical Advisor, Physicians for Human Rights*

Other medical experts share these views. Dr. Ranit Mishori, a family physician at Georgetown University School of Medicine stated there is no current medical reason to use rectal hydration or nutrition since the rectum is an inefficient way to absorb nutrients. Furthermore, the approach risks rectal perforation and infection. Intravenous and tube feeding through the nose are more appropriate, she adds. “**There is clearly no use or benefit,**” Dr. Mishori said. “**As a physician, I can’t see any justification for this. It’s medical, physiological and psychological torture.**”<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Allen Keller, associate professor of medicine at NYU School of Medicine and director of the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture observes that while rectal hydration may be used in rare emergency situations it’s not the first, second, or even third-best option. “This was done not solely for therapeutic reasons but as another form of abuse or humiliation,” said Keller. “**Given the circumstances, this is sodomy with the intention of humiliation under the guise of medical treatment.**”<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Burke added that he had polled more than a half-dozen colleagues with decades of clinical experience and that **none had ever employed it.**<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/press/press-releases/cia-torture-report-highlights-unnecessary-medical-procedure.html#sthash.eU67fmOg.dpuf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-12-10/rectal-feeding-of-detainees-called-abuse-with-guise-of-treatment.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/senate-report-uncooperative-terrorism-suspects-faced-rectal-rehydration-feeding/2014/12/09/fcffb1ec-7fb8-11e4-8882-03cf08410beb\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/senate-report-uncooperative-terrorism-suspects-faced-rectal-rehydration-feeding/2014/12/09/fcffb1ec-7fb8-11e4-8882-03cf08410beb_story.html)

## Background on Rectal Hydration and Rectal Feeding

- Rectal hydration is almost never practiced in medicine because oral and intravenous routes of fluid administration are more effective.
- Rectal hydration is never considered as a first-line form of therapy for rehydration or nutritional support. The large colon has the capacity to absorb fluids, but has a very limited capacity to absorb nutrients with the exception of glucose and electrolytes. Pureed food and nutritional supplements, such as Ensure, should never be administered rectally.
- Historically, rectal hydration had been used in field conditions, particularly during World War II, when severe injuries resulted in marked blood loss and oral and intravenous administration of fluids were not possible. Also, in rare medical circumstances, such as terminally ill patients who are unable to take oral fluids and intravenous access is not possible, rectal hydration has been used.
- The use of rectal hydration and feeding, according to the SSCI summary, was conducted “without medical necessity,” meaning oral and/or IV access was possible in these individuals. Moreover, the SSCI summary indicates that rectal hydration was used to control and/or punish the detainees. For example:
  - The SSCI summary states that: KSM [detainee Khalid Sheikh Mohammed] was subjected to rectal rehydration without a determination of medical need, a procedure that KSM interrogator and chief of interrogations would later characterize as illustrative of the interrogator's 'total control over the detainee.'" (488) An unnamed OMS individual later said that subjecting KSM to rectal rehydration helped "clear a person's head" and was “effective in getting KSM to talk.” (83, 483)
  - The SSCI summary also states that Abu Zubaydah received “rectal fluid resuscitation” for “partially refusing liquids,” while Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri was rectally “infused” with Ensure. (100)
  - Majid Khan’s case illustrates the arbitrary and punitive nature of the procedure. Khan accepted nasogastric and IV feeding and was allowed to infuse fluids/nutrients himself. Nevertheless, after three weeks, the CIA opted to rectally force feed him with Ensure and his own pureed lunch to eliminate “unnecessary conversation.” The SSCI summary states that “Majid Khan’s ‘lunch tray’ of hummus, pasta with sauce, nuts, and raisins was ‘pureed’ and rectally infused.” (100)
- Insertion of any object into the rectum of an individual without their consent constitutes a form of sexual assault.