Persons assigned exclusively, whether for a permanent or temporary period, to medical purposes, namely the search for, collection, transportation, diagnosis or treatment of the wounded, sick, and shipwrecked, or to the prevention of disease, or to the administration or operation of medical units or medical transports.

Medical personnel comprises military and civilian medical personnel (doctors and paramedical personnel) including that of the Red Cross or Red Crescent and civil defence personnel. They are entitled to the protection and treatment stipulated by international law, may not be the object of violence, and if they fall into enemy hands are not considered as prisoners of war and must be set free. However they may be retained to give medical care to prisoners of war, preferably those belonging to the same armed forces as themselves.

They are identified by the distinctive sign of the red cross, red crescent or red crystal worn on their uniform, or on their clothing if they are duly authorized civilian medical personnel.

Members of the armed forces specially trained for employment, should the need arise, as hospital orderlies, nurses or auxiliary stretcher-bearers in the search for or the collection, transport or treatment of the wounded and sick must likewise be respected and protected if they are carrying out these duties at the time when they come into contact with the enemy or fall into his hands. In the latter case they will be considered as prisoners of war but will be employed on medical tasks as needed.
Chapter 7, III. Medical and Religious Personnel

**LEGAL SOURCE**

**definition**

**military (permanent or temporary) medical personnel**


GCII, 36 [12] (see ICRC updated Commentary [13]), 37 [14] (see ICRC updated Commentary [15])

**civilian medical personnel assigned by a party to the conflict**

GCIV, 20 [16]

PL, 8 [17]

**medical personnel made available by third States or organisations to a party to the conflict**

PL, 8 [17]

**personnel of a National Society recognized and specifically authorized by a party to the conflict**
protection

on the battlefield (including inhabitants of the combat zone): may not be attacked and may fulfil medical duties in conformity with medical ethics

once fallen in enemy hands: immediate repatriation or employment
caring for POWs
under control of the enemy: right to perform their medical mission, right not to perform acts contrary to medical ethics, right to maintain medical secret, except as required by law

PI, 15 [22]–16 [23]

PII, 10 [36]

CIHL, 26 [37]

duties

See Medical ethics / Medical duties [38]

DOCUMENTS

ICRC, Appeals on the Near East [39] (C. 9 [40])

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health [41]

CASES

ICRC Report on Yemen [42]

Lebanon, Helicopter Attack on Ambulances [43]
UK, Misuse of the Emblem [44]

British Military Court at Hamburg, the Peleus Trial [45]

Iraq, Medical Ethics in Detention [46]

Iraq, Care for Wounded Enemies [47]

Yemen, Obstructing Medical Care [48]

South Sudan: Medical Care Under Fire [49]

Health Care in Pakistan’s Tribal Areas [50]

United States, Mukhtar Yahia Maji Al Warafi v. Obama [51]

Democratic Republic of Congo, Fighting with the M 23 Group [52]

The armed conflict in Syria [53]

UN, Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit [54]

Afghanistan, Attack on Kunduz Trauma Centre [55]

ICRC, International Humanitarian Law and the challenges of contemporary armed conflicts in 2015 [56] [paras 152 [57], 157 [58], 165 [59]]
Thailand, Attack on Hospital

UN, Security Council Resolution 2286 on Attacks on Hospitals

Italy, Use of force against ambulances in Iraq

Syria, the Battle for Aleppo

South Sudan, Attack in Malakal UN Protection Site

South Sudan, AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan

Syria: Medical support for ISIS

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESOURCES

Suggested readings:


**Further readings:**


“Technical Note: The Red Cross and its Role as an Auxiliary to Military Medical Services”, in *IRRC*, No. 234, May 1983, pp. 139-141

**Source URL:** https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/medical-personnel

**Links**
