

Doctors who are activists remind and inspire us also to do the work

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Launer highlights that many doctors have been called to activism over the decades, investing their knowledge and social capital in their advocacy work.(1) Medical activism encompasses areas as diverse as sanitation, nuclear threat, health inequity, racism, and reproductive justice, among others. (2)

Doctor and aid worker Lynne Jones recently wrote about her journey to activism.(3) She shares her experiences, from opposing nuclear weapons in the 1980s at Greenham Common through to her work with Extinction Rebellion today, offering a ground level account of the role of non-violent direct action in meaningful social change. Her book reminds us that we have more power than we realise and that it's important to use it while we can.

Launer concludes that many of us are “in awe” of the courage of doctors who take personal and professional risks for important causes. Sarah Benn, who was suspended by the General Medical Council after engaging in peaceful climate action, has said that she does not want the focus to be on her but on the gravity of the climate crisis.(4) Similarly, at Jones's book launch she spoke little about herself and mostly about the urgency of her cause. The best compliment we can give people we admire for their activism is to become a part of the movement ourselves.

There are many struggles that have preceded us and many that will go on after us—it's our choice how we engage with them when we're around. Few people who advocate for meaningful change enjoy the praise they get. Other people's activism, if we engage authentically with it, should remind us also to do the work. This is what they would want.

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2. Podolsky S, Jones D, Ackerman AB Medical activists as agents of change. *BMJ*2022;379:o3049. doi:10.1136/bmj.o3049 pmid:36549700
3. Jones L. *Sorry for the inconvenience but this is an emergency: the nonviolent structure for our planet's future*.Hurst & Company, 2024.
4. Lowden S. Suspended climate protest doctor says fitness-to-practise rules need review. doctors.net. 2024. www.doctors.net.uk/news/suspended-climate-protest-doctor-says-fitness-to-practise-rules-need-review.