

# Ambulance Insignias in a Turmoil Zone

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An *ambulance* is a vehicle used for the transport of sick and injured people. Ambulances serve an especially vital role in the management of the sick and injured in conflict zones.

During the recent unrest in Kashmir, ambulances played a pivotal role in the continued functioning of various hospitals. The situation in the streets was so bad that ambulances were used to ferry patients, staff, and materials for a considerable period of time. As the streets were plagued with fighting between stone-pelting youth and the police, ambulances were attacked on several occasions. Numerous incidences of damage to the ambulances were reported, as well as incidences in which ambulance personnel were assaulted.

Ambulances are adorned with passive visual warnings including a prominent emblem. In Kashmir, the International Red Cross performed an information drive whereby hospitals were asked not to display the Red Cross on the ambulances. It also was requested that the Red Cross symbol be replaced by the Star of Life on the ambulances.

Over a period of time, the Star of Life was painted on all ambulances in Kashmir. The logo is unicolor, most often a slate or medium blue. The Star of Life is a blue, six-pointed star, outlined with a white border which features the Rod of Asclepius in the center, originally designed and governed by the US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (under the United States Department of Transportation). Internationally, it represents emergency medical services units and personnel.<sup>1</sup>

During the prolonged unrest in the valley of Kashmir, the ambulance drivers regularly reported that the crowds and security personnel who stopped them found the symbol to be incomprehensible. Under those conditions, almost all ambulance drivers thought that the symbol was not “protective”.

Universally, the Red Cross is considered a symbol of humanity.<sup>2</sup> In order to avoid frequent attacks and checks, some ambulance drivers started putting prominent red cross markings on their ambulances during their movement. This was done in an unauthorized manner. A significant drop in the number of attacks and checks was reported. This method has caught on to the extent that almost all ambulances plying on the roads at this moment have Red Cross insignias prominently displayed on their bodywork.

This brings into question the influence and propriety of copyright-protected symbols in conflict zones, especially when pivotal workers like ambulance drivers feel a sense of safety provided by them. Is it important to prevent “misuse” of copyright protected symbols in situations where the delivery of health care is helped by this misuse?

## References

1. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: Criteria for use of blue “Star of Life” for emergency medical services. *Fed Regist* 1994;59(154):41359–41364.
2. Feld G: The Red Cross, A symbol of humanity. *Krankenpflege (Frankf)* 1972;26(11):481–482.

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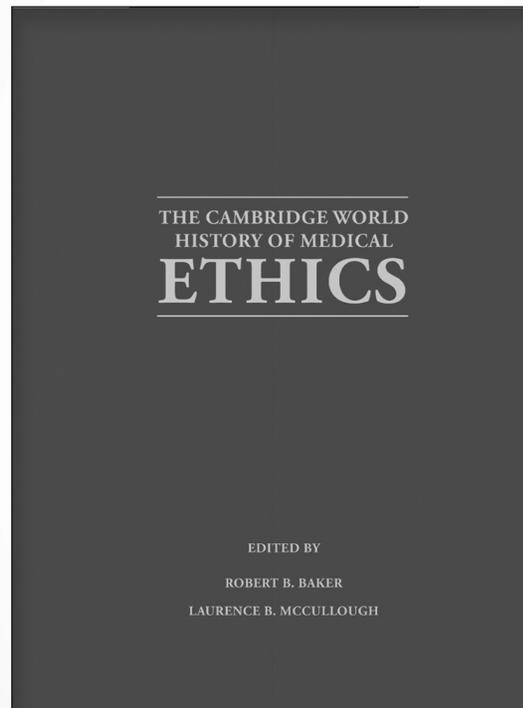
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