

SUS will withdraw from FALCO if the Israeli partners continue their participation

The Board of Stavanger University Hospital (SUS) made the following decision at its meeting on 29 September:

The Board supports that Stavanger University Hospital (SUS) will withdraw from the research project FALCO if the dialogue process currently being facilitated by Norce does not result in the two Israeli partners withdrawing from the project by the end of 2025.

In her recommendation to the Board, CEO Helle Schøyen advised that SUS should end its participation if the Israeli partners remain involved, with the following reasoning:

Participation in EU-funded projects is a priority for Stavanger University Hospital (SUS). This is strategically important for further developing and strengthening our position as a university hospital, in terms of funding, international networks, and publications. It is also significant for retaining and recruiting skilled professionals. For our patients, it means the opportunity to take part in unique, innovative clinical studies.

FALCO is a very strong project aimed at a vulnerable patient group where more research is needed. It is well established with a well-organized local structure under the leadership of Professor Aleksander Hagen Erga.

That Israel is one of seven countries participating with two research institutions is highly problematic considering the brutal warfare in Gaza, where Israel continues to violate international law.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that in countries with such regimes, it can often be particularly important to maintain academic collaborations. As a major academic institution and employer, SUS has a responsibility to safeguard the principle of academic freedom, and the CEO therefore does not consider it appropriate to recommend a general academic boycott between individual researchers and research environments. Norwegian authorities have also repeatedly made it clear that a general boycott of Israel is not under consideration.

Nevertheless, when we believe it is right for SUS to withdraw from FALCO due to Israel's participation, this is also tied to the fact that hospitals and healthcare personnel have repeatedly been targets of Israeli attacks. Both local and international healthcare workers in Gaza face unbearable living conditions, and many lose their lives simply because they are present and doing their jobs for a civilian population suffering unimaginable hardships because of occupation and war. SUS also has several employees who regularly travel on assignments to war and conflict zones.

The CEO therefore considers this incompatible with institutional-level collaboration with Israeli partners.

Norce, which leads and coordinates the project, is currently conducting one-on-one conversations with all FALCO partners to assess the situation regarding the project's implementation and the cooperation with Israel. None of the Israeli partners have so far indicated that they are considering withdrawal. According to the CEO, it is also highly unlikely that this will change. Should this happen, the reasons for SUS to end its participation would no longer apply.