

MONTHLY REPORT

Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip

March 2012



World Health
Organization

occupied Palestinian territory

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Referrals from Gaza: Summary for March 2012

- A 17-year-old female referral patient from Gaza died while undergoing critical heart surgery at Makassed Hospital, after waiting her permit to cross Erez was delayed. She had missed her original appointment at Makassed Hospital after both of her parents were denied approval to cross Erez in order to accompany her. A second permit application was eventually approved, allowing the mother to accompany her daughter to hospital appointment scheduled two weeks later.
- In March, 94.4% (725 patients) of all patient applications for permits were approved, an improvement over the 2011 average of 90%. However, 9 patients (1.2%) who applied for a permit to cross Erez checkpoint were denied a permit during March, and 34 patients, including 8 children (4.4%), did not receive a response to their permit request before the date of their hospital appointment.
- The main reasons for patient referrals during February were for treatment in the following subspecialties: cardiovascular (17%), oncology (12%), ophthalmology (9%), neurosurgery (6%) and orthopedics (5%). These cases represent 49% of the total referrals and 60% of the estimated total referral cost in March, which was NIS 12 million (\$3.2 million).

Destinations and reasons for referral for medical treatment

During March 2012, the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) of the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) referred 1,295 patients to health facilities for specialized treatment not available in MoH facilities in Gaza. Similar to last month, 22% (284 patients) were referred to NGO or private facilities within the Gaza Strip and 78% (**1,011 patients**) were referred outside of Gaza to hospitals in East Jerusalem (35.5%), Egypt (26.7%), Israel (24.4%), the West Bank (9.3%) and Jordan (4.1%). Of these, 741 patients required permits to access through Erez crossing and 270 through Rafah border crossing (see Table 1, below).

Referral Destination	MoH Referrals			Total 2012
	January	February	March	
Gaza (Non MoH facilities)	289	258	284	831 (21.4%)
West Bank (MoH & NGOs)	110	101	94	305 (07.9%)
East Jerusalem	374	301	359	1034 (26.7%)
Egypt	319	240	270	829 (21.4%)
Jordan	47	53	41	141 (03.6%)
Israel	254	237	247	738 (19.0%)
Total	1,393	1,190	1,295	3,878

*Referrals are recorded according to month of scheduled hospital appointment. Source: MoH RAD Gaza.

Patients were referred during March mainly for treatment in the following subspecialties: cardiovascular (17%), oncology (12%), ophthalmology (9%), neurosurgery (6%) and orthopedics (5%). These cases represent 49% of the total referrals and 60% of the estimated total referral cost in March, which was NIS 12 million (\$3.2 million). These cases represented 45% of the total referrals last month and 51% of the total cost.

Permit applications for patient referrals through Erez

In March 2012, the Israeli District Liaison Office (DCL) processed 768 patient applications for permits to cross Erez to access hospitals in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, Israel and Jordan (see Table 2) compared with 766 last month and 902 in January 2012. During this month 92.1% of applications (708) were submitted and financially covered by the MoH, 3.3% (26) were self-funded, 1.5% (12) by Nour al-Alam Foundation, 1.3% (10) by Peres Center for Peace, 0.9% (7) by Physicians for Human Rights - Israel, and the remaining 5 cases by other funds.

Age group	Total		Approved*		Denied		Delayed**		Called for GSS interrogation***	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	63	53	62	53	0	0	1	0	0	0
4 - 17	70	90	67	86	0	0	3	4	0	0
18- 40	95	88	90	75	0	5	5	8	3	3
41 - 60	99	103	98	92	1	3	0	8	1	1
Over 60	46	61	42	60	0	0	4	1	0	1
<i>Sub-total</i>	373	395	359	366	1	8	13	21	4	5
Total	768		725 (94.4%)		9 (1.2%)		34 (4.4%)		9(1.2%)	

* Approvals are typically communicated to the patient only 24 hours in advance of their scheduled appointments.

** "Delayed" means that the Israeli Liaison Office did not respond to the permit application prior to the patient's hospital appointment date. Some patients in this category may eventually receive permit approval, but after their hospital appointment has passed, and must then reschedule their appointment. Other patients in this category may eventually receive denials or may not receive any response.

*** Requests for interrogation are reported here when communicated by Israeli authorities through the Palestinian Liaison Office. Israeli security officials also contact patients directly for interrogation; therefore the number reported is likely underreported.

In March, **94.4%** (725 patients) of all patient applications for permits were approved, representing an improvement over the 2011 average of 89.7%. Of the remaining 5.6% of all patients, 1.2% (9 cases) were denied permission to cross Erez checkpoint. Four of the 9 denied patients had been referred for orthopedic treatment, 2 for neurosurgery, and one for internal medicine, neurology and ophthalmic. Another 4.4% (34 patients, including 8 children) had their applications delayed beyond their hospital appointment. **Nine patients were called for interrogation by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS) as a condition for their permit application.** Following their interrogation, 6 patients were still waiting for a GSS response, 2 were asked to submit a new request, and one was approved a permit.

Delays in processing applications can be critical for patients who are waiting for urgent medical treatment (see below, case of Shahira Saber Hammad). During 2011, three patients died before receiving permits to travel through Erez crossing to access the hospitals they have been referred to. Since 2008, 70 referral patients were reported to have died before reaching medical care outside Gaza (50 referrals through Erez crossing and 20 through Rafah border crossing).

Table 3: Crossing data for treatment outside Gaza, March 2012				
Point of exiting Gaza	Patients crossing	Ambulance transfers (back-to-back)	Days open in month	Special conditions
Erez crossing (North)	708	50	25 (closed on 30 March for land day and four Saturdays)	Only access point for medical care in oPt, Israel and Jordan
Rafah crossing (South)	350	67	26 (closed on four Fridays)	Only access point to medical care in Egypt

Young Gaza teenager dies during surgery after waiting two weeks for permit approval

Shahira Saber Hammad, a 17-year-old teenager and a referral patient from Gaza, died March 26 at Makassed Hospital during open heart surgery to repair an atrial septal defect. Shahira had been referred for the corrective surgery by her treating doctor at Shifa Hospital on February 13, 2012, but was delayed in accessing care after her first permit application to cross Erez was not granted.

On February 15, the family received a referral for Shahira to be treated at Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem, and admission was scheduled for Shahira on **March 11, 2012**. On March 5, Shahira submitted her application to the Palestinian DLO for permission to cross Erez on the appointment day, and listed both parents as possible companions --- for Israeli Authorities to choose one. The Palestinian DLO raised the request to the Israeli side but was informed that both parents were denied and that patient should submit the name of another companion.

After consulting with the family, the Palestinian DLO informed the Israeli Authorities on March 7 that there was no other family member available to accompany her, and so the family was asked to choose one parent to accompany Shahira. On March 12 the Israeli permit office informed the family to reschedule their hospital appointment, which was then arranged with Makassed Hospital for March 25.

On March 22, the Israeli authorities at Erez approved the permit request for Shahira, and her mother as companion, and both crossed Erez on **March 25**. Shahira arrived at Makassed Hospital in a poor health condition and was placed immediately in the intensive care unit; her doctors decided to perform the open heart surgery the next day, but unfortunately Shahira died during the surgery.

Table 4: District Liaison Office decisions on permit requests to cross Erez (number and %, by response and by sex of applicant)

Period	March 2011		March 2012		January – March 2011		January – March 2012	
Total	1071 (F:465; M:606)		768 (F:373; M:395)		768 (F:373; M:395)		1,668 (F: 780; M:888)	
Approved	968 (F:433; M:535)	90.4%	725 (F:359; M:366)	94.4%	1,528 (F:665; M:863)	83.3%	1,548 (F:731; M:817)	92.8%
Denied	26 (F:6; M:20)	2.4%	9 (F:1; M:8)	1.2%	43 (F:7; M:36)	2.3%	16 (F:4; M:12)	1.0%
Delayed	77 (F:26; M:51)	7.2%	34 (F:13; M:21)	4.4%	263 (F:83; M:180)	14.3%	104 (F:45; M:59)	6.2%
<i>Out of which called for GSS interrogation (of total applicants)</i>	11 (F:1; M:10)	1.0%	9 (F:4; M:5)	1.2%	26 (F:5; M:21)	1.4%	40 (F:12; M:28)	2.4%

Table 5: Referrals out of Gaza by geographic location (total numbers and %)

Period	March 2011		March 2012		January – March 2011		January – March 2012	
Total outside Gaza	1,107		1,011		3,108		3,047	
West Bank	77	7.0%	94	9.3%	233	7.5%	305	10.0%
East Jerusalem	345	31.2%	359	35.5%	919	29.6%	1034	33.9%
Egypt	356	32.2%	270	26.7%	1072	34.5%	829	27.2%
Jordan	17	1.5%	41	4.1%	66	2.1%	141	4.6%
Israel	312	28.2%	247	24.4%	818	26.3%	738	24.2%

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