



In early April 2020, 56-year-old paediatric nurse Awatef Handal was called by her employer Caritas Baby Hospital in Bethlehem in the West Bank to assist with a suspected case of COVID-19, a boy from Hebron district. As the on-call nurse was Awatef's job to stay with the young boy while he had a test taken for COVID-19.

"It was very stressful, emotionally and physically...I was worried if the boy would test positive I was worried for myself and worried that if I was exposed to this I would also bring it home and expose my family."

"On the other hand being in the full gear, wearing the personal protective equipment, is also very exhausting. I had to stay in full gear while waiting for the result. It was around eight hours, where you are breathing inside the gear and you start feeling the sweat and the humidity inside."

Thankfully the boy tested negative and Awatef realized that she had the right personal protective equipment and training to ensure she and her five children and husband were safe during the COVID-19 response.

“When it all began it was very scary that I would go to the hospital and might be exposed and I might bring it back to my family. But now I know that if I take all the precautions and wear the protective equipment properly then I minimize the risk. I got training on the use of the personal protective equipment and how to protect ourselves, and how to make sure that we do not increase the spread. How we put on our protective equipment at the beginning of each shift, determines our fate.”

Awatef has been a nurse for more than 30 years and believes nurses are not properly acknowledged for their work in general and even now with the COVID-19 response the emphasis is on what doctors do you do not hear about the things nurses do even though they do a lot.



WHO celebrated the work of nurses and midwives on World Health Day on April 7 to remind world leaders of the critical role nurses and midwives play in keeping the world healthy. Nurses and other health workers like Awatef are at the forefront of COVID-19 response - providing high quality, respectful treatment and care, leading community dialogue to address fears and questions.

Despite this, she really appreciates her job: “I love nursing, in the past when I studied nursing, it was challenging and it was not a famous position. People looked at nursing as a job to serve people. I always loved helping others and I look at it as a humanitarian call. Especially children, I feel that I find myself with children for me being a children’s nurse is a very privileged position to be in. Watching a child get better is a wonderful experience and this gives you a feeling of achievement and satisfaction at the end of a long day.”

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