

Press release

WHO video: Impact of drug shortages on different groups of patients in the Gaza Strip 28 April 2015, Gaza Strip

"I tried hard in the past 9 months to get the medication for my wife for a period of only 3 months. I was told that 120 cases are waiting before my wife. When is our turn?... maybe when death comes!" – husband of Hepatitis C patient.

Patients in Gaza face a constant challenge in trying to access quality public health services. The Ministry of Health (MoH) suffers from chronic shortages of basic medical supplies, medicines, electricity, fuel and equipment. In a [video](#) released today by WHO, Gaza physicians, patients and family members describe what shortages mean for those gravely ill: premature infants, and patients with multiple sclerosis, hepatitis C, rheumatoid arthritis and cancer.

During 2014, an average of 26% of essential drugs and 47% of medical disposables were unavailable. Inadequate supplies weaken the health system and deprive patients of good health options. The situation improved with the influx of international donations during and after the summer war, but shortages persist, causing long waiting lists of patients and increasing referrals of more critical patients to hospitals outside of the Gaza Strip, where access is an additional difficulty.

As the video illustrates, 47% of 203 cancer patients are still waiting for their therapies while 20% have been referred outside Gaza for treatment, at a cost of 3 to 10 times the cost of the medication itself. "In the past, my dream was to increase awareness of early detection for breast cancer and to make Gaza cancer free," said Eman Shanan, breast cancer survivor and the director of Aid and Hope program for cancer patients care. "Now, to be realistic, after 3 wars, I think it's difficult to make this dream come true."

Medicines that are costly, serve smaller patient groups, have limited suppliers, or are not immediately 'life-saving' are most often missing. But particular medicines are life-lines for certain groups of patients, and shortages have profound impact on quality of life, meaning unnecessary suffering, prolonged illness, long-term disability or endangered lives. 70% of hepatitis C patients registered in the Ministry of Health Central Drug Store (CDS) have been waiting for the availability of the treatment since 2013. All 222 rheumatoid arthritis patients registered in CDS have been waiting since 2012. All 40 multiple sclerosis patients registered in 2014 are still waiting for treatment and are at risk for complications.

WHO has been monitoring the barriers to health care access since 2003 and has advocated for full unrestricted access for Palestinian patients to health care facilities, including access to medicines, both within the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), and beyond. Dr Mahmoud Daher, head of the WHO Gaza sub-office, explained the problem of drug shortages as being "critical" for a long time. Other problems add to the crisis. "The 7-year-old blockade on the Gaza Strip has deteriorated the health situation and affects the provision of health care services. Shortages of medical disposables mean more referrals of patients outside the Gaza Strip to access needed health care. These referrals require open borders to allow people to travel to access health care abroad."

Dr. Daher also points out that many families are still living in shelters after losing their houses in the summer 2014 war. "The reconstruction process is very slow which affects the public health in the Gaza Strip." Dr. Daher added.

Short video: [Impact of drug shortages on different groups of patients in the Gaza Strip](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sg2BYSwwPYs)
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