

Rodina Abu Khrais, a 4 year-old-girl with a congenital heart defect, has been unable to access urgent health care for the past two years. In 2013 Rodina had heart surgery in Tel Hashomer hospital shortly after birth and had three follow up visits, one of which required an admission for one month. Since July 2015, the family has applied 10 times for an exit permit for catheterization and evaluation for additional heart surgery for the child without success.



Seven times the request was still under study on the date of the hospital appointment, and on two occasions the family was asked to change the companion. Once there was no response at all to the request. All four grandparents and a family relative have been listed as possible companions but no approval was given. The child has a number of disabilities, said the father: "Rodina depends on oxygen therapy most of the time, and cannot talk or walk. She also has a hearing impairment and clings to her mother most of the time." The family has appealed through the ICRC and two local human rights organizations without success and have another permit request pending.

Health Access for Referral Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: 2
(Published April 19, 2017)

Summary: February 2017

Difficult access through Erez crossing

- **40% of patients were denied/delayed permits:** Of 2,391 patient applications for a permit to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in February, 1,431 (59.85%) were approved; 74 patients (3.09%) were denied permits while 886 (37.06%) received no response including 192 children and 77 people over 60 years (WHO Case Studies, p. 4) (Palestinian District Liaison office in Gaza).
- **About half of patients' companions were denied/ delayed permits:** The approval rate for permit applications of patient companions was 50.4%; 4.5% of the companions were denied permits and the remaining 45.1% were still pending by the patients' scheduled hospital dates.
- **Security interrogations for patients:** 35 patients (25 males; 10 females) including 3 men over 60 were requested by the General Security Services for interviews at Erez during February. 6 were approved.

Limited access through Rafah

- **Limited access to Egypt:** According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was open in both directions for 3 days only in February allowing 280 patients to travel for health reasons to Egypt.

Table 1: Humanitarian health workers access through Erez:

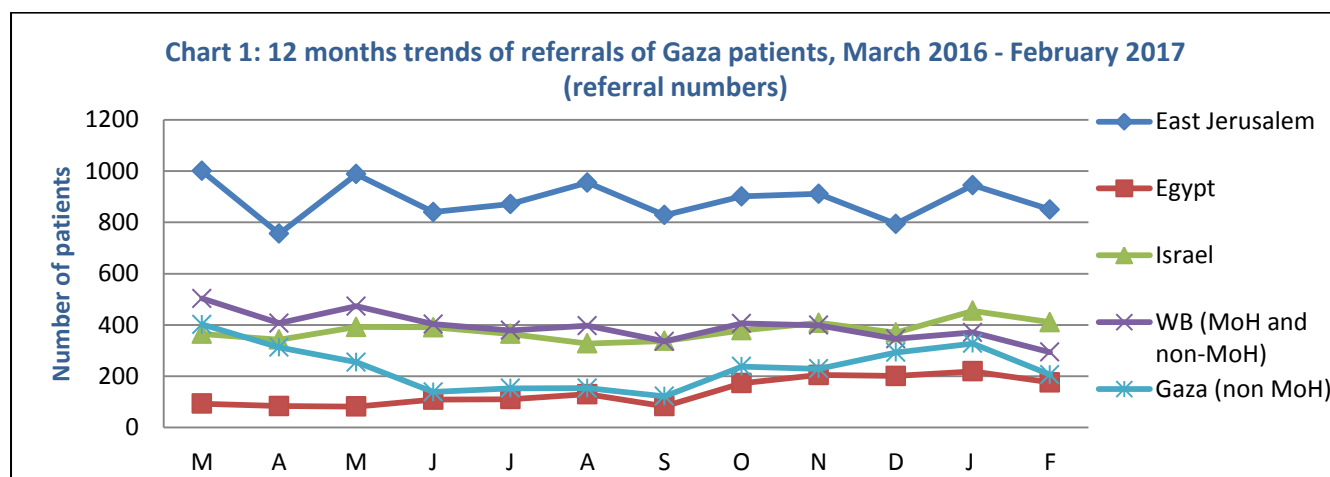
	Requests	Approved	Denied	Pending
WHO for Jerusalem staff to enter	4	1	0	3
WHO for Gaza staff to exit	8	2	0	6
WHO for Health Cluster partners	1	1	0	0
International medical delegates	4	4	0	0
Total	17	8	0	9

Ministry of Health Referrals

Referrals and financial coverage: The Ministry of Health issued 1,937 referral decisions for 1,735 Gaza patients (46.8% female patients and 53.2% male patients) in February for outside care with an estimated cost of NIS 9,136,437. The top 5 needed specialties for Gaza patients were in oncology, hematology, ophthalmology, heart catheterization, and pediatrics.

Table 2: Ministry of Health Referrals in February 2017*

Medical Referral	Patients	Percentage		Patients	Percentage
Oncology	502	25.9%	Nuclear medicine	100	5.2%
Haematology	163	8.4%	Cardiology	65	3.6%
Ophthalmology	133	6.9%	Internal medicine	62	3.2%
Heart catheterization	125	6.5%	Neurosurgery	62	3.2%
Paediatrics	114	5.9%	20 other specialties	502	25.9%
Orthopaedics	109	5.6%	* N = 1,937		



1,555 referrals (80.3%) required Israeli permits for access through Erez checkpoint and 176 (9.1%) required approval from Egypt to exit through Rafah (and the Rafah border to be accessible).

ACCESS

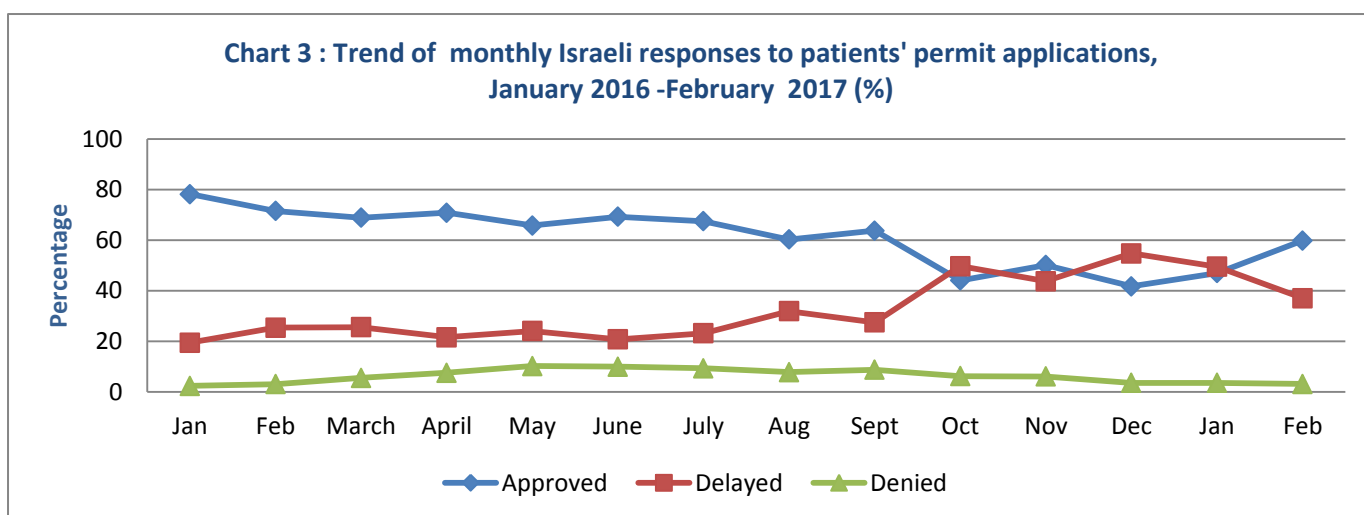
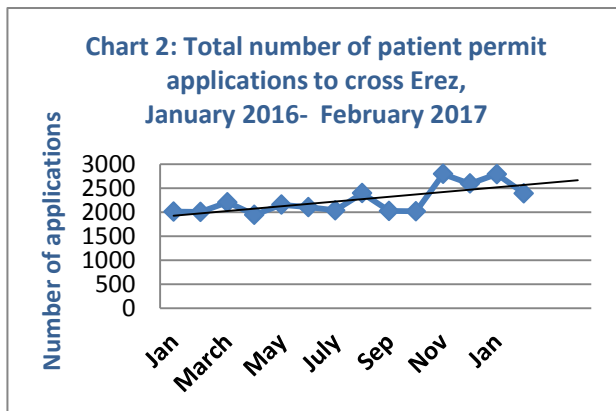
Rafah crossing: Limited access to Egypt during February: According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was open on 3 days during February for humanitarian cases, allowing 280 patients with 109 companions to cross, a 50% reduction from the number of patients who accessed the border in January. Two of the patients, with 2 companions, were transferred by ambulance. The total number of humanitarian travellers crossing to Egypt was 1,600 persons. No medical aid or medical delegates entered Gaza during the month. In the year 2016, the Rafah crossing was open only 38 days for humanitarian cases, allowing a total of 1,690 patients to travel into Egypt for health care. Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4,000 Gaza residents crossed Rafah terminal to Egypt monthly for health-related reasons.

Erez crossing: Improvement in permit approval rates compared to the last 4 months: In February, there were 2,391 applications from patients for permits to cross Erez for health care. There was some improvement in the Israeli processing time of patient permits, as seen by a decrease of re-applications by patients. About 19% (455) of patient exit permit requests February were repeats after earlier requests were unanswered and patients lost appointments: 4 attempts for 1 patient, 3 attempts for 15 patients, and 2 attempts for 203 patients. In January the repeat rate had been 27%. The remaining 81% (1936) applications represented single attempts by patients during the month.

The top receiving hospitals in February were Augusta Victoria, 568 (23.8%) and Makassed, 553 (23.1%) in East Jerusalem; Hadassah, 174 (7.3%) in Israel; Najah University in Nablus 163 (6.8%); Tel-Hashomir, 161 (6.7%) in Israel; St. John hospital, 120 (5%) in East Jerusalem; Ichilov hospital 76 (3.2%) in Israel; Msalam center for ophthalmology, 74 (3.1%)

in Ramallah; St. Joseph hospital in Jerusalem 68 (2.8%); and Assuta hospital, 66 (2.8%). The remaining 368 (15.4%) were to 27 other hospitals and medical centers.

In February, the Palestinian District Coordination office reported that 59.85% of applications for patients' permits were approved, 13.5% higher than the average of the last 4 months (Oct-Jan), but still lower than the monthly average in 2016 (62%), Chart 3. Of those not approved, 74 applicants (3.09%) were denied access, 886 (37.06%) applications were pending and patients lost their hospital appointments, delaying their medical care. 35 patients were requested for security interviews with the Israeli security.



Of the 2,391 patients applying for permits to cross Erez, 93.9% received referrals from the Ministry of Health, 2.8% were self-funded, 2.1% were supported by Noor Ala Al-alam charity and the remaining 1.1% by other organizations.

Denied care: 74 patients (60 males; 14 females) were denied permits to access through Erez, including 6 patients over 60 years old. The following specialties were needed by patients who were denied permits: orthopedics (21); oncology (10); ophthalmology and general surgery (7) each; internal medicine and neurosurgery (5) each; nephrology and ENT (4) each; and the remaining 11 were for 6 other specialties.

Delayed care: 886 patients (518 males; 368 females) were delayed in reaching health care in February, among them 192 children and 77 patients over the age of 60; those delayed received no response to their applications and consequently lost their scheduled hospital appointments. The delayed patients (886) had treatment appointments in: oncology (214); hematology (89); cardiology (87); ophthalmology (75); orthopedics (69); pediatrics (60); neurosurgery (52); general surgery (38), internal medicine (31), and the remaining 171 were for 15 other specialties.

Patients need to submit their applications at least 10 days prior to the hospital appointment. In February, out of the 886 delayed patients about 90% submitted their applications 10 days or more prior to the appointment date.

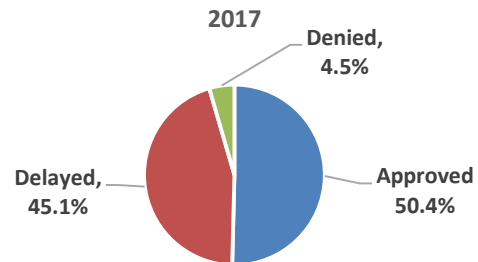
Patients' companions: In February, 2,648 applications for relatives accompanying patients (including parents of children) were submitted to the Israeli authorities. Only one first-degree relative is permitted to accompany a Gaza patient and permits are conditional on security clearance for all persons under the age of 55 years. Approval rates for patients' companions have declined steadily from 2012 to December 2016 where it was the lowest ever (35%) but slightly improved in February 2017. In February, 50.4% were approved, 4.5% were denied and 45.1% were delayed and pending Chart 4.

Security interviews: 35 patients (25 males; 10 females), among them 3 men over 60 years, were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS), including 12 (34%) oncology patients. Of the 35 patients requested by the GSS, 6 were approved after the interview. There has been a steady increase in the number of patients requested for GSS since December 2015.

Patients and companions cross Erez: The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,355 Gaza patients and 1,264 companions crossed Erez in February to access Palestinian, Israeli, or Jordanian hospitals; of these,

52 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulances, with 39 companions. Erez crossing was open for 24 days during daytime working hours and closed on 4 days (4 Saturdays) in February.

Chart 4: Israeli responses to patients' companions exit permit applications, February 2017



Case studies: patients delayed medical care

- Fouad Skaik**, a 53-year-old man diagnosed with rectal adenocarcinoma, had an appointment for a PET scan in Assuta Hospital in Israel. Fouad travelled previously to hospital accompanied by his wife on four occasions, the last time in September 2015. Since December 2016, he has lost 5 appointments because his applications were still under study. He finally received a permit April 2 and was able to travel to hospital.
- Hedaya Abu Oubaid**, a 26-year-old woman with renal failure who is on hemodialysis, requires an A-V shunt and was referred to Makassed Hospital in Jerusalem. She requested her mother as her companion. Since November 30, 2016, Hedaya applied four times for a permit without success. Three times she was told her permit applications were under study and the fourth time she was informed a permit was denied. She is still waiting for a permit.
- Siriya Abu Shamala**, a 45-year-old woman, was diagnosed with breast cancer in Gaza and received two sessions of chemotherapy at Augusta Victoria Hospital, where she was accompanied by her 50-year-old sister. Since December 20, Siriya has lost eight hospital appointments because her applications were “under study”. Her husband appealed through a local human rights organization. “Currently, her health status is stable. But doctors said if she does not continue her treatment, she will suffer complications,” her husband said.
- Sameer Abu Anza**, a 20-year-old man with brain cancer, received 35 radiotherapy sessions and 10 chemotherapy treatments in Ichilov Hospital in Israel as of September 2016. He needs to continue his treatment but was denied a permit since then and lost three hospital appointments. He appealed through a local human rights organization and is now scheduled for an appointment on April 24 which he hopes he will be able to attend.
- Mohammed Al-Jbery**, a 45-year-old man with brain cancer and recurrent seizures, had surgery at Shifa hospital and was referred to Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem for chemotherapy. He received partial treatment in December 2016 but then was not approved for travel to complete his treatment in early 2017. He lost four hospital appointments after being told a response to his exit permit request was “under study”. He is now waiting for an appointment from the Israeli security forces for an interview.
- Loai Abu Arafat**, a 27-year-old male with colon cancer, received chemotherapy in Al- Najah Hospital several times until January 2017, but has not been able to obtain a permit to continue his therapy. Recently, he lost 3 hospital appointments because he was denied. On a phone interview Loai told WHO, “I am currently hospitalized at the European Gaza Hospital. I feel very frustrated and my health is getting worse. I will apply again for a permit.”
- Hani Al-Harazeen**, a 49-year-old man with lung cancer, received several sessions of radiotherapy in Augusta Victoria Hospital, but has been denied a permit to continue his treatment since February 2016. In March 2016 he was requested by the Israeli security for interrogation and afterwards he lost nine hospital appointments because his permit applications were denied. He appealed through a local human rights organization who informed him that he was denied for security reasons. Hani told WHO, “After the last denial in February I stopped applying. I do not know what to do”.

