MONTHLY REPORT Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip January 2012



Ref: RAD 1 (February 17, 2012)

Referrals from Gaza: Summary for January 2012

- A 25-year-old male patient with a valid permit was detained at Erez Crossing.
- 6 patients (0.6%) who applied for a permit to cross Erez checkpoint were denied a permit during January, and 49 patients, including 9 children (5.4%), did not receive a response to their permit request before the date of their hospital appointment.
- The main reasons for patient referrals during January were for treatment in the following subspecialties: cardiovascular (14%), oncology (11%), ophthalmology (7%), orthopedics (6.6%) and neurosurgery (6%). The cases represent 45% of the total referrals and 55.6% of the total estimated cost for referrals for the month of \$3.5 million.

Destinations and reasons for referral for medical treatment

During January 2012, the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) of the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) referred 1,393 patients to health facilities for specialized treatment not available in MoH facilities in Gaza: of these, 289 patients were referred for specialized treatment within the Gaza Strip (to NGO or private hospitals) and **1,104 patients were referred outside of Gaza** to hospitals in East Jerusalem (34%), Egypt (29%), Israel (23%), the West Bank (10%) and Jordan (4%). Of these, 785 patients required access through Erez crossing and 319 through Rafah border crossing (see Table 1, below).

Table 1. Palestinian MoH Referrals in January 2012, by destination and month*					
Referral Destination	MoH Referrals January	Total 2012			
Gaza (Non MoH facilities)	289	289			
West Bank (MoH & NGOs)	110	110			
East Jerusalem	374	374			
Egypt	319	319			
Jordan	47	47			
Israel	254	254			
Total	1,393	1,393			

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

Patients were referred during January mainly for treatment in the following subspecialties: cardiovascular (14%), oncology (11%), ophthalmology (7.4%), orthopedics (6.6%) and neurosurgery (6%). These cases represent 45% of the total referrals and 55.6% of the estimated total referral cost in January, which was NIS 13 million (\$3.5 million).

Permit applications for patient referrals through Erez

In January 2012, the Israeli District Liaison Office (DCL) processed 902 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 760 last month and 711 in November 2011. During this month 87% of applications (784) were submitted and financially covered by the MoH, 6% (56) by Nour al Alam Foundation, 4.4% (40) were self-funded, 1.7% (16) by Physicians for Human Rights - Israel, 0.4% (4) by Peres Center for Peace, and the remaining by other charity organizations.

Table 2: Israeli Liaison Office decisions on patient permit requests to cross Erez in January 2012, by age and sex										
Age group	Total Approved*		oved*	Denied		Delayed**		Called for GSS interrogation***		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
0 - 3	80	82	79	78	0	0	1	4	0	0
4 - 17	109	82	106	81	0	0	3	1	0	0
18- 40	103	99	85	89	4	1	14	9	9	4
41 - 60	117	100	105	99	1	0	11	1	5	1
Over 60	64	66	62	63	0	0	2	3	0	0
Sub-total	473	429	437	410	5	1	31	18	14	5
Total	902		847 (93.9%)		6 (0.6%)		49 (0.5%)		19	

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

In January, **94%** (847 patients) of all patient applications for permits were approved, an improvement over the 2011 average of almost 90%. Of the remaining 6% of all patients, 0.6% (6 cases) were denied permission to cross Erez checkpoint. Another 5.4% (49 patients, including 9 children) had their applications delayed beyond their hospital appointment. **19 patients were called for interrogation by the Israeli General Security Services** (**GSS**) as a condition for their permit application. Following their interrogation, 14 patients were still waiting for a GSS response, 4 were approved a permit, and one was denied.

Delays in processing applications can be critical for patients who are waiting for urgent medical treatment. During 2011, three patients died before receiving permits to travel through Erez crossing to access the hospitals

^{**} Permit applications for patient access through Erez can only be submitted within 10 days of hospital appointments. When there is no timely response from the Israeli Liaison Office, the applications are registered here as "delayed", meaning that the Palestinian Liaison Office received no response 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. They must then reschedule their appointment. Other patients in this category may eventually receive denials or may not receive any response.

^{***} These are requests for interrogation as communicated by Israeli authorities through the Palestinian Liaison Office. This may be underreported since Israeli authorities sometimes contact patients directly for interrogation.

they have been referred to. Since 2008, 71 referral patients were reported to have died before reaching medical care outside Gaza.

Erez and Rafah crossing data for January 2012

Erez crossing was open for a total of 27 days. According to the Palestinian Liaison Office at Erez, **822 patients** crossed Erez checkpoint during January 2012, of which 51 were transported by ambulance. Since Palestinian ambulances are not permitted to leave Gaza, patients must be transferred from a Palestinian ambulance, and carried on a stretcher to an Israeli ambulance at Erez checkpoint 200 meters away.

Rafah border crossing was open for humanitarian access for a total of 23 days in January 2012; it was closed on 4 Fridays and on 3, 7, 11 and 25 January due to Egyptian official holydays and elections. The total number of patients that crossed Rafah border during January was 591, including 93 by ambulance. This includes patients who were seeking medical treatment at their own expense and, therefore, traveled without RAD financial referral document. In January, the waiting time for non-urgent referrals through Rafah crossing was less than one week.

25-year-old patient with valid permit detained at Erez crossing

Bassam Rehan, a 25-year-old male resident of Jabalia, was detained by Israeli authorities at Erez while he was enroute to Hebron for medical referral. Bassam was shot in his left thigh 3 years ago by Israeli soldiers while working in the area near Erez. The wound was treated in Gaza, but Bassam continues to suffer from severe pain due to nerve damage. His treating physician referred him to Al Mezan Hospital in Hebron, West Bank, for follow up. The referral documents were submitted and Bassam received both a hospital appointment for January 19 and an Israeli permit to cross Erez on the same day. On the day of his appointment, Bassam, accompanied by his aunt, reached the Israeli side at Erez but instead of crossing, was taken for interrogation. His aunt was informed of his detention and was told to return back to Gaza. The Israeli Authorities informed his father two hours later that Bassam had been moved to Ashkelon prison. Bassam's family contacted the ICRC and the Palestine Human Rights Center which coordinated with Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) to follow up his case. On February 9, 2012, after 21 days detention, Bassam was released and returned to Gaza without being able to access medical treatment in the West Bank.

Table 3: Data for 2011 and 2012. District Liaison Office decisions on permit requests to cross Erez in 2011 compared to 2012 by month and year, by response and sex							
Period	January 2011			January 2012			
Total	935 (F:367; M:568)			902 (F:429; M:473)			
Approved	744 (F:307; M:437)		79.6%	847 (F:410; M:437)	93.9%		
Denied	22 (F:5; M:17)		2.4%	6 (F:1; M:5)	0.7%		
Delayed	169 (F:55; M:114)		18.1%	49 (F:18; M:31)	5.4%		
Called for GS interrogation (of total appli		15 (F:3; M:12)	1.6%	19 (F:5; M:14)	2.1%		

Table 4: MoH Referrals outside Gaza in 2011 and 2012, by month and geographic location						
Period	Janua	ry 2011	January 2012			
Total outside Gaza	1,163		1,104			
West Bank	70	6.0%	110	10.0%		
East Jerusalem	294	25.3%	374	33.9%		
Egypt	531	45.7%	319	28.9%		
Jordan	22	1.9%	47	4.3%		
Israel	246	21.2%	254	23.0%		

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