

MONTHLY REPORT

Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip

March 2011



World Health Organization

occupied Palestinian territory

Summary for March 2011

- A 3-year-old girl suffering from meningitis and related health complications died while waiting for referral to an Israeli hospital.
- 90% of applications for permits to cross Erez were approved.
- Nearly half of referred patients were transferred for the following health conditions: cardiovascular diseases, oncology, orthopedics, ophthalmology and neurosurgery.
- 31% of essential drugs and 19% of essential medical disposables were at zero stock level (less than one month's supply).

Permit applications for patient referrals through Erez

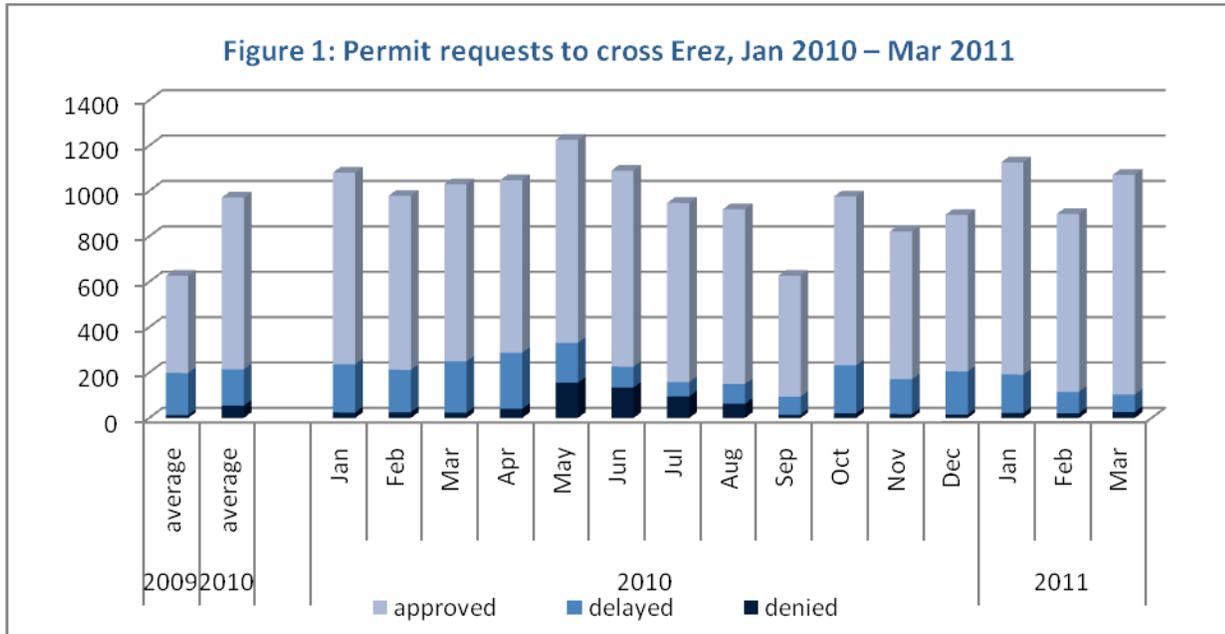
During March 2011, the Israeli District Liaison Office (DCL) processed 1,071 patient applications for permits to cross Erez checkpoint to access hospitals in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Israel and Jordan (see Table 1).

| Age group | Total | | Approved | | Denied | | Delayed | | | | Did not cross despite approval | |
|-----------|-------|-----|----------|-----|--------|---|---------|----|---|---|--------------------------------|---|
| | | | | | | | | | Out of which called for GSS interrogation | | | |
| | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| 0 - 3 | 92 | 75 | 89 | 75 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4 - 17 | 148 | 109 | 146 | 102 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 18 - 40 | 144 | 104 | 102 | 88 | 14 | 4 | 28 | 12 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 41 - 60 | 143 | 104 | 123 | 99 | 6 | 2 | 14 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Over 60 | 79 | 73 | 75 | 69 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sub-total | 606 | 465 | 535 | 433 | 20 | 6 | 51 | 26 | 10 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 1071 | | 968 | | 26 | | 77 | | 11 | | 0 | |

90% (968 patients) of all applications were approved. This is substantially higher than the average for 2010, which was 78% (see Figure 1). 2% of all patients (26 cases) were denied permission to cross Erez checkpoint. Another 7% (77 patients, including 12 children) had their applications delayed.

Of the 77 patients whose applications were delayed by the Israeli authorities, 11 were called for an interrogation by the Israeli Intelligence Services, known as General Security Services (GSS). 3 of these patients did not attend the interrogation; the other 8 patients, who did attend, are still waiting for an answer from GSS as to whether they are authorized to cross Erez or not.

64% of delayed patients faced delays of more than a week. Delayed patients generally miss their hospital appointments. In most cases they have to seek new appointments and submit new applications for a permit to cross Erez checkpoint. Delays in processing applications can be critical for patients who are waiting for urgent medical treatment. Some may die while waiting for permission to access the medical facility they have been referred to. (See “Death of Sajeda Fouad Abu Otaiwy” below.) **Since the beginning of the year 2009 a total of 36 patients have died before being able to access the hospital they had been referred to.**



Destinations and reasons for referral

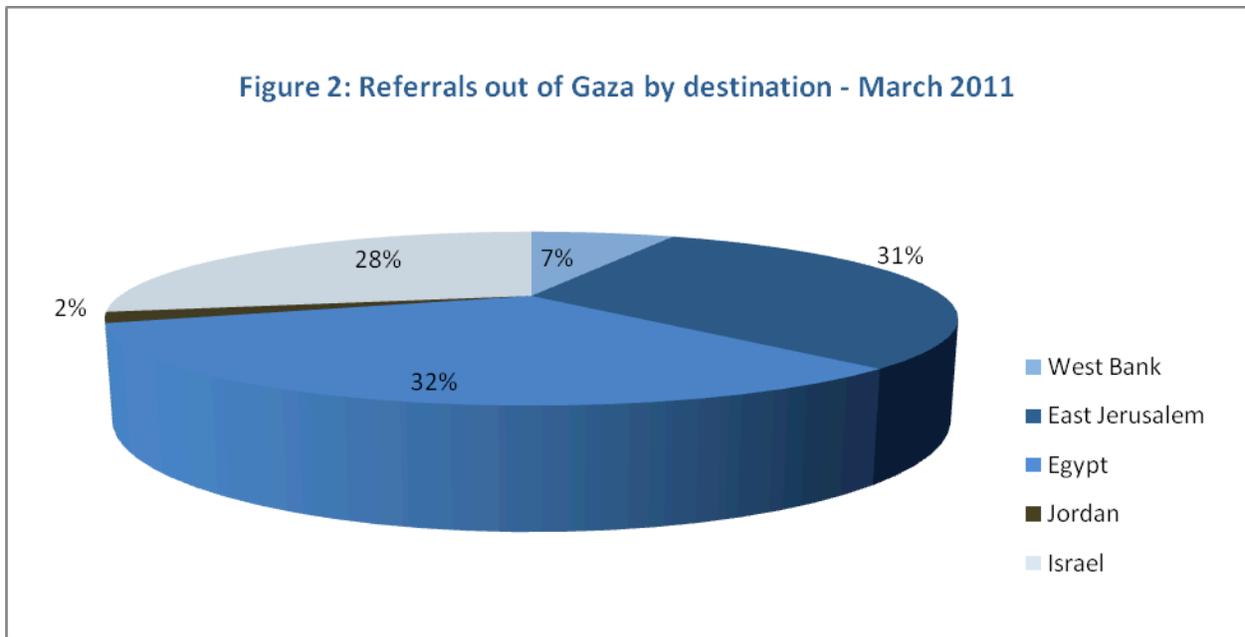
During March 2011, the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) of the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) approved and issued 1,570 referral documents compared with 1,285 in February. RAD found that 463 patients were able to receive appropriate treatment within the Gaza Strip, in either NGO or private hospitals.

The remaining **1,107 patients had to leave Gaza** in order to be treated in hospitals in Egypt (32%), East Jerusalem (31%), Israel (28%), the West Bank (7%) and Jordan (2%) (see Figure 2). The percentage of referrals to Egypt has risen again after a significantly lower number in February (22%) compared to previous months. Rafah crossing was closed due to the political unrest in Egypt for 20 consecutive days from 30 January. Some patients prefer to be referred to Egypt in order to avoid the cumbersome process of obtaining a permit to cross through Erez. This is particularly true for men aged 18-40, who have only a 50% chance of obtaining an Israeli-issued permit.

The main reasons for referrals in March were: cardiovascular i.e. heart diseases (12%), oncology i.e. cancer (10%), ophthalmology i.e. eye conditions (9%), orthopedics (6%) and neurosurgery (5%)¹. These health conditions accounted for 42% of all referrals from Gaza; together they made up 53% of the total cost of referrals in March, which reached NIS 12.7 million.

¹ These figures include referrals to NGO and private hospitals inside Gaza. For technical reasons it is not currently possible to provide a separate breakdown for patients who have to leave the Gaza Strip.

Figure 2: Referrals out of Gaza by destination - March 2011



Erez and Rafah crossing data for March 2011

According to the Palestinian Liaison Officer at Erez, 892 patients crossed Erez checkpoint during March 2011², 54 of whom needed to be transported by ambulance. Because Palestinian ambulances are not permitted to leave Gaza, the patients were transferred from one ambulance to another (back-to-back) at Erez checkpoint. This compares to 734 patients, including 38 via back-to-back ambulances, in February 2011.

Rafah border crossing was open throughout March 2011. An estimated 400 patients managed to leave Gaza through Rafah for treatment in Egypt. This includes patients who were seeking medical treatment at their own expense and, therefore, traveled without a RAD referral document.

Death of Sajeda Fouad Abu Otaivy (3 years old)

Sajeda Fouad Abu Otaivy, a 3-year-old girl, died while waiting for referral from Gaza to a hospital in Israel. Sajeda had suffered from meningitis, an inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord, since she was six months old and had been undergoing treatment ever since. As a result of medical complications, she also developed a brain disorder and muscle convulsions, which caused her body to shake uncontrollably.

Over time, Sajeda's condition deteriorated and the doctors at Nasser Pediatric Hospital in Gaza were unable to provide her with the health care she needed. Consequently, she was referred to Chaim Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer, Israel by the Peres Center for Peace. She obtained an appointment at the hospital for 14 February 2011.



² The discrepancy between the number of permits approved (968 for March 2011) and the number of patients who crossed in this same month (892), is due to the fact that patients who have their permits approved at the end of one month might only cross the following month.

To ensure that Sajeda would be able to attend her hospital appointment, her family submitted a permit application to the Israeli authorities on 25 January 2011. Although Sajeda's permit was approved, her father's request to travel as her companion was denied. Sajeda's family applied for her mother to travel with her instead. This permit request was left unanswered by the Israeli authorities. The Palestinian District Liaison Office's attempt to follow up with the Israeli authorities was unsuccessful.

In the meantime, Sajeda missed her appointment. The Peres Center for Peace rescheduled with the Chaim Sheba Medical Center for 14 March 2011. On 10 March Sajeda's family was informed that permits for her and her mother had been approved. However, on 3 March 2011, Sajeda died.

Update on drugs and disposables in Gaza

On 21 March 2011, the Central Drugs Store (CDS) in Gaza reported that 151 drugs – out of the 480 on the essential drugs list – were at zero stock level (less than one month's supply). The shortages may seriously affect medical treatments and have adverse, even fatal, consequences for patients, for example those suffering from cancer since 20 chemotherapy drugs were at zero stock level. 17 antibiotics, 10 hematologic (drugs to treat blood diseases) and 6 ophthalmic drugs, 5 special milk formulas and 5 drugs for treating immune disorders were also in short supply in March. The remaining drugs at zero stock level were for use in primary health care.

In addition, 135 medical disposable items - out of the 700 on the essential disposables list - were reported as being at zero stock level.

These severe shortages have been ongoing in Gaza since December 2010 despite the shipments sent by the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) in Ramallah. Items sent lasted for short periods only – often less than a month – and did not cover all of the zero stock items. The zero stock figures for February 2011 (150 drugs and 136 disposables) were at practically the same level as in March⁴.

Essential drugs and medical disposables are considered necessary for the provision of essential health care. The Palestinian MoH in Ramallah is responsible for providing drugs to MoH facilities in both the West Bank and Gaza.

Further information

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³ See WHO Background Note on Drug Shortages in Gaza, 3 February 2011: <http://www.issuu.com/who-opt/docs/backgroundnote-drugs>

Annex 1: Historic data

| District Liaison Office decisions on permit requests to cross Erez (total number and % per decision for given period) | | | | | |
|--|--------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Period | Total | Approved | Denied | Delayed | |
| | | | | | Out of which called for GSS interrogation ⁴ |
| Jan 2010 | 1081 | 845 78.2% | 24 2.2% | 212 19.6% | 85 7.9% |
| Feb 2010 | 979 | 767 78.3% | 25 2.6% | 187 19.1% | 38 3.9% |
| Mar 2010 | 1029 | 780 75.8% | 23 2.2% | 226 22.0% | 30 2.9% |
| Apr 2010 | 1047 | 760 72.6% | 40 3.8% | 247 23.6% | 42 4.0% |
| May 2010 | 1225 | 894 73.0% | 155 12.7% | 176 14.4% | 52 4.2% |
| Jun 2010 | 1090 | 864 79.3% | 134 12.3% | 92 8.4% | 61 5.6% |
| Jul 2010 | 947 | 789 83.3% | 95 10.0% | 63 6.7% | 31 3.3% |
| Aug 2010 | 919 | 770 83.8% | 87 9.5% | 62 6.7% | 20 2.2% |
| Sep 2010 | 626 | 532 85.0% | 14 2.2% | 80 12.8% | 15 22.4% |
| Oct 2010 | 976 | 744 76.2% | 21 2.2% | 211 21.6% | 6 0.6% |
| Nov 2010 | 821 | 650 79.2% | 17 2.1% | 154 18.8% | 13 1.6% |
| Dec 2010 | 895 | 690 77.1% | 15 1.7% | 190 21.2% | 20 2.2% |
| Jan 2011 | 935 | 744 79.6% | 22 2.4% | 169 18.1% | 15 1.6% |
| Feb 2011 | 899 | 784 87.2% | 21 2.3% | 94 10.5% | 11 1.2% |
| Mar 2011 | 1071 | 968 90.4% | 26 2.4% | 77 7.2% | 11 1.0% |
| 2010 | 11635 | 9085 78.1% | 650 5.6% | 1900 16.3% | 413 3.5% |
| 2009 | 7514 | 5130 68.3% | 149 2.0% | 2235 29.7% | 636 8.5% |

⁴ The percentage rates for patients called for an interrogation with GSS are calculated from the total number of permit applications submitted.

**Referrals out of Gaza by geographic location
(total numbers and % per destination for given period)**

| Period | West Bank | East Jerusalem | Egypt | Jordan | Israel |
|----------|--------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Jan 2010 | 125 | 327 | 172 | 11 | 189 |
| | 15.2% | 39.7% | 20.9% | 1.3% | 22.9% |
| Feb 2010 | 148 | 327 | 167 | 21 | 168 |
| | 17.8% | 39.4% | 20.1% | 2.5% | 20.2% |
| Mar 2010 | 87 | 364 | 204 | 10 | 205 |
| | 10.0% | 41.8% | 23.4% | 1.1% | 23.6% |
| Apr 2010 | 97 | 299 | 280 | 7 | 183 |
| | 11.2% | 34.5% | 32.3% | 0.8% | 21.1% |
| May 2010 | 176 | 342 | 209 | 9 | 230 |
| | 18.2% | 35.4% | 21.6% | 0.9% | 23.8% |
| Jun 2010 | 125 | 301 | 443 | 10 | 186 |
| | 11.7% | 28.3% | 41.6% | 0.9% | 17.5% |
| Jul 2010 | 140 | 253 | 470 | 14 | 203 |
| | 13.0% | 23.4% | 43.5% | 1.3% | 18.8% |
| Aug 2010 | 129 | 323 | 388 | 11 | 257 |
| | 11.6% | 29.2% | 35.0% | 1.0% | 23.2% |
| Sep 2010 | 99 | 212 | 414 | 8 | 206 |
| | 10.5% | 22.6% | 44.1% | 0.9% | 21.9% |
| Oct 2010 | 114 | 285 | 496 | 24 | 189 |
| | 10.3% | 25.7% | 44.8% | 2.2% | 17.1% |
| Nov 2010 | 108 | 246 | 429 | 10 | 216 |
| | 10.7% | 24.4% | 42.5% | 1.0% | 21.4% |
| Dec 2010 | 124 | 238 | 537 | 15 | 211 |
| | 11.0% | 21.2% | 47.7% | 1.3% | 18.8% |
| Jan 2011 | 70 | 294 | 531 | 22 | 246 |
| | 6.0% | 25.3% | 45.7% | 1.9% | 21.2% |
| Feb 2011 | 86 | 280 | 185 | 27 | 260 |
| | 10.3% | 33.4% | 22.1% | 3.2% | 31.0% |
| Mar 2011 | 77 | 345 | 356 | 17 | 312 |
| | 7.0% | 31.2% | 32.2% | 1.5% | 28.2% |
| 2010 | 1472 | 3517 | 4209 | 150 | 2443 |
| | 12.5% | 29.8% | 35.7% | 1.3% | 20.7% |
| 2009 | 1327 | 2453 | 3203 | 364 | 1158 |
| | 15.6% | 28.8% | 37.7% | 4.3% | 13.6% |