

This week the WHO oPt completed a \$2 million project, funded by the Gulf Cooperation Council, administered by the Islamic Development Bank and approved by the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Ramallah, for the procurement of life-saving essential medications to help meet the needs of patients at MoH facilities in Gaza. Through the three-phased project, the WHO oPt procured 48 essential medications and 3 special infant formulas for the Ministry's Central Drug Store (CDS) in Gaza, where there is a chronic shortage of drugs. The majority of the medications procured were for cancer therapy, ophthalmologic problems, cardiovascular disease, anticonvulsants, blood disorders and psychotherapy. Three special milk formulas were also provided for infants with allergies or digestive deficiencies. The medications were delivered to the CDS for disbursement to the 13 hospitals and 54 primary health clinics operated by the Ministry of Health in Gaza.

The public health facilities in Gaza depend on regular shipments of drugs and supplies from the Ministry of Health in Ramallah, but 14% to 37% of medications on the essential drug list have been out of stock since 2007. In July, 30% of essential medications, as well as 20% of essential medical disposables, such as dialysis machine filters and IV tubing, were reported at zero stock. Donors and charities contribute medications and supplies on an ad hoc basis to reduce the gap, but shortages have remained at critical levels in 2011.

The shortages affect the delivery of health services and have resulted in: a curtailing of the number of surgeries, necessitating referrals abroad for serious cases; reusing of medical disposables which pose potential risks for patient safety; rescheduling of procedures, such as kidney dialysis, due to reduced number of functioning machines; and patients seeking medications from other health providers, purchasing cheaper and often inappropriate substitute medications.

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