

8 February, 2018, Gaza Strip – Gaza’s health sector was on the verge of collapse due to dwindling fuel supplies until the United Arab Emirates stepped in this week with a US\$ 2 million grant to sustain hospital backup generators for critical health services. The donation will provide enough fuel to keep facilities running for several months.

“The UAE’s timely support will save lives, but a more sustainable solution is required to address the chronic fuel and power shortages in Gaza that leave health facilities consistently on the verge of closure,” says Dr. Gerald Rockenschaub, Head of WHO’s Office for West Bank and Gaza.

Daily power cuts of 12-16 hours currently affect 28 hospitals and 153 primary care facilities in the Gaza Strip. The Ministry of Health has been rationing fuel supplies since January, when UN supplies for backup generators in 14 public hospitals drastically declined.

Between late January and early February 2018, two hospitals were forced to shut down: Durrah Hospital serving a catchment area of 250 000 people, and Gaza Psychiatric Hospital, the only mental health hospital in Gaza. Beit Hanoun Hospital, a 63-bed hospital located in the northern Gaza Strip, was also partially closed, with the Emergency Department functioning at minimal capacity.

Public hospitals in the Gaza Strip provide life-saving health care for 1715 patients every day – including 113 newborns, 100 patients in intensive care units, 702 patients requiring haemodialysis, 200 patients in need of surgery, 100 women in need of obstetric surgeries, and 500 patients in need of emergency care.

Hospitals in Gaza are already over-stretched, with a bed occupancy rate of over 90%. With the closure of some hospitals, the extra burden placed on the remaining hospitals in operation will further strain the delivery of services, including surgery, emergency departments, intensive care units and maternity services.

“WHO is working with the Ministry of Health to establish longer-term strategic solutions to Gaza’s fuel crisis through the use of solar power, and establishing a dedicated and sustainable

grid supply to support Gaza's essential hospitals," says Dr Mahmoud Daher, Head of WHO's sub-office in Gaza.

Under-resourced public hospitals also face severe shortages in medicines and medical supplies. In January 2018, 40% of the essential drugs were completely depleted. This includes drugs used in emergency departments and other critical units. WHO is distributing over US\$1 million worth of medical equipment and procuring over US\$ 1.2 million worth of medicines and disposables, but these will only be sufficient to meet the critical patient needs in Gaza for less than 3 weeks.

More than 1.27 million people in the Gaza Strip are in need of critical life-saving health services in 2018. As part of the Humanitarian Response Plan for Gaza, US\$ 3.12 million is required by WHO and health partners to ensure the continuity of life-saving health services this year.

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