

Unprecedented financial crisis is undermining the delivery of health services by the six East Jerusalem Hospitals (EJHs), which are major providers of referral health care for Palestinians in the oPt.

The World Health Organization reports that an unprecedented financial crisis is undermining the delivery of health services by the six East Jerusalem Hospitals (EJHs), which are major providers of referral health care for Palestinians in the oPt. The crisis is a result of the Palestinian Authority's (PA) failure to pay for patient care; the PA owes over NIS 85 million as of the end of November 2012. The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MOH) refers to these hospitals more than 20,000 patients from the West Bank and Gaza, who need specialized services and procedures unavailable elsewhere in the oPt.

The financial crisis has affected all six EJH - Princess Basma Rehabilitation Center, Augusta Victoria Hospital, Maqassed Hospital, St. John Eye Hospital, St. Joseph Hospital, and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society Hospital. However, more than half of the PA's debt is owed to a single hospital, Augusta Victoria. This hospital specializes in oncology and kidney dialysis: 70 per cent of all oncology cases from Gaza and 40 per cent from the West Bank, primarily breast, colon and blood cancers, are referred to Augusta Victoria for chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Augusta Victoria's Director, Dr. Tawfiq Nasser, reported that most chemotherapy and pre-chemotherapy drugs are at zero stock and suppliers are not resupplying due to unpaid bills. The drug shortages due to lack of funds mostly affect breast cancer patients, who represent 60 per cent of oncology cases at the hospital. If one drug is lacking from the chemotherapy treatment regimen, their response rate will drop precipitously and negatively impact the outcome of treatment. The hospital is trying to cope by limiting drug procurement to the highest priority items, but cancer treatment is costly; for example, patients on Herceptin need weekly doses for one year, at a cost of NIS 9000 per dose.

According to Dr. Nasser, "If the crisis continues we will not be able to accept any new patients, or pay our employees' salaries." The PA had previously agreed to make monthly payments but has been unable to do so; the last payment received was a transfer, in early September, of NIS 7 million, about 10 per cent of what is owed to Augusta Victoria. The PA, in turn, is looking for donor funding to be reestablished at levels that will allow it to fund these basic services.

In order to maintain their operations, all hospitals are reviewing running costs, including staff levels, to find reductions. Some hospitals have already taken extraordinary measures such as releasing staff, reducing the number of admissions and curtailing services. Some patients who have turned up for appointed surgeries or treatment have had appointments rescheduled because of the lack of drugs needed for their treatment.

The EJH have played a critical role in providing health services to the Palestinian people for decades, especially for the poor. In addition to patients referred by the MOH, 20 per cent of the patients who access care at the EJHs are social cases without insurance or sufficient resources.

[You can access this text in OCHA Monthly Humanitarian Monitor, October/November 2012, page 14 and 15](#)

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