



1 July 2019 – WHO has successfully evacuated a 60-year-old female patient with a mental disorder from Al Hol camp in north-east Syria to a WHO-supported psychiatric hospital in Aleppo.

Afaf suffers from schizophrenia, a severe mental disorder that often includes psychotic experiences such as delusions or auditory hallucinations. Before she was successfully evacuated, Afaf had been living in Al-Hol camp in Al-Hasakeh governorate for several months. Due to her condition, she was shunned by her neighbours and was forced to live alone.

WHO had provided training for health care workers at Al-Hol camp on diagnosing and managing mental health disorders. Thanks to their training, health workers at the camp were able to diagnose Afaf's illness. However, the specialized treatment and medicines required to manage her case were not available at the camp, and consultations with a WHO mental health specialist led to an agreement that she must be referred to a specialized hospital.

The nearest psychiatric hospital, Ibn-Khaldoun hospital in Aleppo governorate, is around 450 kilometres away. WHO engaged in lengthy negotiations with camp authorities, health partners and local health authorities to organize Afaf's medical evacuation. Once all approvals had been obtained, Afaf and the evacuation team embarked on the long and difficult journey to Aleppo through the damaged roads, and frequent delays at multiple checkpoints.

Another problem arose en route. Afaf, like many others in Al-Hol camp, had no identity papers and was denied permission to enter Aleppo governorate. She was admitted to a local hospital in Manbej while WHO, with the help of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, negotiated her entry into Aleppo with local authorities.

After several days, the evacuation team was able to resume its journey and Afaf was rushed to Ibn-Khaldoun hospital, where she immediately began receiving treatment.

Afaf's story illustrates the difficulties and complexities of providing humanitarian health assistance to persons in need in the conflict-affected areas of Syria. "We were able to help Afaf because we have a network of local staff throughout the country and we have excellent working relationships with health partners and local health authorities," said Ms Elizabeth Hoff, WHO Representative in Syria. "However, Afaf is one of the lucky ones. Tens of thousands of other people in Al-Hol and other camps in Syria have no identity papers and face similar difficulties. WHO will continue to do everything it can to ensure that all patients in Syria receive the health care they need."

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