17 December 2023 — WHO staff participated in a joint UN mission to Al-Shifa Hospital in north Gaza on 16 December to deliver health supplies and assess the situation in the facility. Partners on today's mission included OCHA, UNDSS, and UNMAS. The team delivered medicines and surgical supplies, orthopedic surgery equipment, and anesthesia materials and drugs to the hospital.

Al-Shifa Hospital, currently minimally functional, needs to urgently resume at least basic operations to continue serving the thousands in need of lifesaving health care.

Once the most important and largest referral hospital in Gaza, Al-Shifa now houses only a handful of doctors and a few nurses, together with 70 volunteers, working under what WHO staff described as “unbelievably challenging circumstances,” and calling it a “hospital in need of resuscitation.” The operating theatres and other major services remain nonfunctional due to lack of fuel, oxygen, specialized medical staff, and supplies. The hospital is only able to provide basic trauma stabilization, has no blood for transfusion, and hardly any staff to care for the constant flow of patients. Dialysis is being provided to approximately 30 patients a day, with the dialysis machines operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week, using a small generator.

The team described the emergency department as a “bloodbath”, with hundreds of injured patients inside, and new patients arriving every minute. Patients with trauma injuries were being sutured on the floor, and limited to no pain management is available at the hospital. WHO staff said that the emergency department is so full that care must be exercised to not step on patients on the floor. Critical patients are being transferred to Al-Ahli Arab Hospital for surgeries.

Tens of thousands of displaced people are using the hospital building and grounds for shelter. A multi-pronged humanitarian response is needed to provide them with food, water and shelter.

Many of them asked our team to tell the world what is happening in the hope that their suffering might soon be eased. Al-Shifa Hospital continues to experience a severe shortage of food and safe water for health workers, patients, and displaced people. This reflects grave and growing concerns around persistent hunger across the Gaza Strip, and the consequences of malnutrition on people’s health and susceptibility to infectious diseases.

WHO is committed to strengthening Al-Shifa Hospital in the coming weeks, so that it can resume at least basic functionality and continue to provide the lifesaving services that are needed at this critical time. Up to 20 operating theatres in the hospital, as well as post-operative care services, can be activated if provided with regular supplies of fuel, oxygen, medicines, food, and water. Substantial additional specialized medical, nursing and support staff, including emergency medical teams are also urgently needed.

Currently, Al-Ahli Arab Hospital remains the only partially functional hospital in north Gaza along with three minimally functional hospitals – Al-Shifa, Al Awda and Al Sahaba Medical Complex - down from 24 before the conflict. WHO is also gravely concerned at the unfolding situation at

Kamal Adwan Hospital and is gathering information urgently.

As hostilities continue and health needs across the Gaza Strip increase, Al-Shifa Hospital, a cornerstone of Gaza's health system, must be urgently restored so that it can serve a besieged people trapped in a cycle of death, destruction, hunger, and disease.

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Sunday 7th of July 2024 05:20:55 AM