



14 September 2020 - **Saja** is a 9-year-old girl who was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia in May 2019.

She needs a bone marrow transplant, not available in the Gaza Strip, and has not been able to access the treatment she needs since March 2020.

Saja's mother is from Morocco, and she was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia during a family visit to Rabat, Morocco, in May 2019. Saja received her initial chemotherapy in Rabat, before returning home to Gaza in February 2020 to continue her treatment and undergo bone marrow transplantation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

An initial appointment was scheduled for 22 March 2020 at An-Najah Hospital in Nablus, in the West Bank, but the hospital only offers autologous transplantation (using the patient's own bone

marrow), while Saja needed an allogeneic transplant (with bone marrow from a donor). Saja was rescheduled an appointment at Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem, but again the hospital could only offer autologous transplantation. Eventually, on 15 July 2020, Saja received an appointment to attend the King Hussein Cancer Centre in Jordan, however she was unable to exit to Jordan because of the border closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

After a delay of around six weeks, Saja was scheduled for an appointment at Tel Hashomer, an Israeli hospital east of Jaffa, for 6 September. However, Israeli authorities advised the family to change her companion since her mother doesn't have a Palestinian ID. The family appealed the decision in the Israeli civil courts through Physicians for Human Rights Israel, after rearranging her hospital appointment to 15 September. On 14 September, Saja's appeal was upheld; she was finally able to travel for treatment the next day.



Throughout efforts to refer Saja for bone marrow transplant, she has been receiving chemotherapy at Rantisi Hospital in Gaza City. Her mother, Najlaa, commented, “We are from Rafah, and the journey from Rafah to Gaza takes about an hour. At times we’ve had to attend Rantisi Hospital every other day. It’s exhausting and putting a strain on us physically and financially.”

Saja’s health has been deteriorating in recent months, as she suffered the effects of leukaemia. Admitted to Rantisi Hospital before hearing the result of her appeal, she had needed platelets but faced severe delays with the outbreak of COVID-19 in the Gaza Strip. Even relatives who had been willing to travel to donate platelets for her had not been able to reach the hospital due to the movement restrictions in place.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, just as outside it, no patient should be delayed or prevented from accessing the healthcare they need.

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