

# MONTHLY REPORT

## July 2020



## Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **6,265**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

**1,186** Gaza

**5,006** West Bank

 **138**

Gaza patients exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez for healthcare

**122**

Gaza patient companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez



No comprehensive data available for West Bank patient and companion permit applications

following suspension to functioning of Civil Affairs Office; 661 permits approved for patients to access Augusta Victoria Hospital and 278 to Makassed.

 **3**

Gaza patients called for security interrogation

### IN FOCUS

*Patients in the Gaza Strip continue to face major barriers to accessing healthcare*


# Part 1 Referrals


## July Referrals by the Ministry of Health

In July, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 6,265 referrals to non-MoH facilities. 80% (5,006) of referrals were for West Bank patients, including 902 for patients from Jerusalem, while 1,186 (19%) were for Gaza patients, 2 for Palestinian patients in Jordan, 1 in Egypt and 1 in Syria. The origin of 69 referrals was not reported. The number of referrals issued declined from June, particularly for patients from the West Bank outside of East Jerusalem (from 5,115 in June to 4,104 in July), see Chart 1. In the Gaza Strip, the significantly lower number of referrals issued has persisted, with 1,186 issued in July compared to 1,288 in June and a monthly average of 956 in May and April. The number of referrals for the Gaza Strip in July is just under half (48%) of the monthly average in the first quarter of 2020. Meanwhile, the number of referrals issued for the West Bank has returned to a similar number issued monthly prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in the oPt. Persistent severe movement restrictions in the Gaza Strip, exacerbated by the end to coordination of patient permits, are likely to be the main contributing factor to explain this difference.

From all referrals in July, the proportion of those destined for hospitals within the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, increased from 40% in the first quarter to 48% in July. Referrals within Gaza increased from 7% to 14%. Meanwhile, referrals to East Jerusalem hospitals decreased from 41% to 33%; to Israeli hospitals from 5% to 3%; and to Egypt from 6% to 0.4%. 0.2% of referrals were to Jordan.

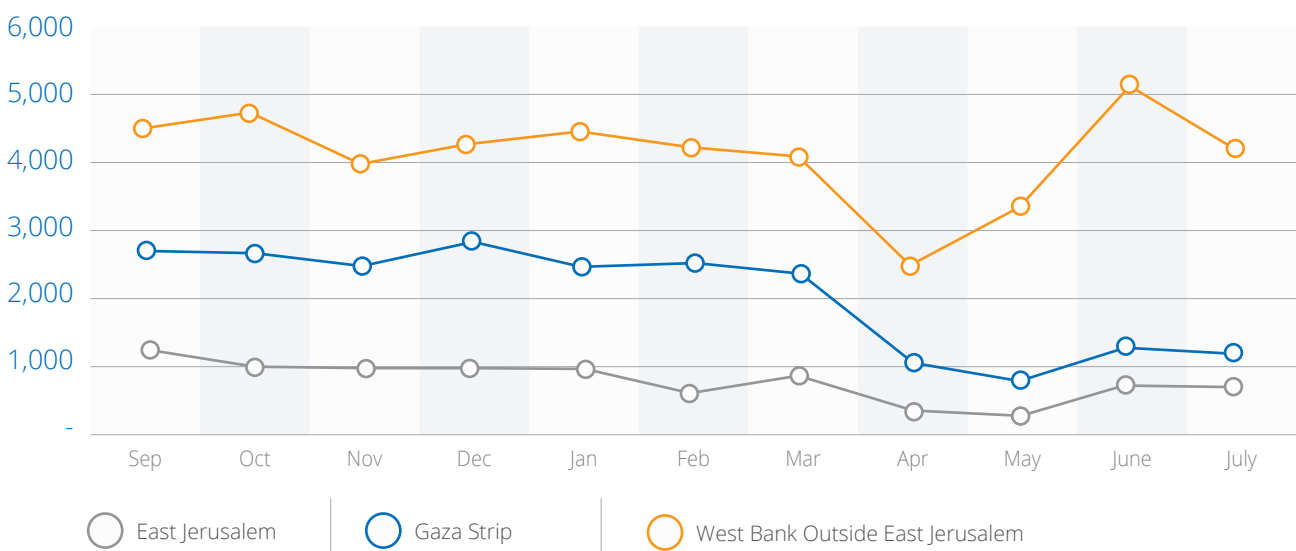
17% (1,089) of all referrals were for patients under 18-year-old and 31% (1,967) were for those aged 60 years or older. 47% of referrals were for female patients.

 **1,186**  
Gaza Strip

 **5,006**  
West Bank

referrals approved financial coverage for healthcare outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health

**Chart 1** Number of referrals issued by the Palestinian MoH by place of origin, Sep 2019 to July 2020



# Part 2 Access

## The Gaza Strip

The Health Liaison Office of the Palestinian MoH ceased coordinating permit applications and the movement of patients, companions, and ambulances from the Gaza Strip after 19 May. In July, this situation persisted, with several organizations intervening to assist patients and their companions. Five organizations provided data to WHO on permits applications for Gaza patients. In total, there were 150 recorded approvals for patient permits and 210 recorded applications for patients during the month, see Table 1.

Organization applied	# of applications	# Approved
Augusta Victoria Hospital	149	42
Makassed Hospital		28
St. John Hospital		2
International Committee of the Red Cross		33
Physicians for Human Rights - Israel	61	45
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>150</b>

**Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH)** submitted 149 requests for Gaza patients, of whom 42 (28%) were approved and 107 (72%) were either pending response at the end of July or delayed, missing their initial hospital appointments.

**Makassed Hospital** coordinated the entry of 28 patients from the Gaza Strip for appointments at the hospital in July. All were urgent cases.

**St. John Hospital** received 2 patients from the Gaza Strip in its outpatient clinic.

**The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** coordinated the exit of 33 (M: 22; F: 11) patients during the month of July. All of them were referred as urgent cases. 15 were children and 18 adults. One infant was funded by Shevet Achim and the rest of the patients (32) were funded by the Palestinian MoH. The ICRC also coordinated the return of 3 patients and 3 bodies of deceased persons to Gaza.

**Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI)** made 61 permit applications on behalf of patients: 44 for adult patients and 17 for children under the age of 18. Of the 61, 38 had appointments in East Jerusalem Hospitals, 18 in the West Bank and 5 in Israeli hospitals. 42 (69%) applications were for oncology patients. 45 (74%) of the 61 patient permit applications were approved.

Not all partners were able to provide data on companion applications and approvals, though the majority of patients traveled with a companion. PHRI submitted 62 applications for companions of patients during July, of which 17 were for parents of children under the age 18. 38 (61%) applications of the 62 were approved, of which 14 were applications for parents of sick children.

### Security interrogation

3 patients were interrogated by Israeli security services, including one patient interrogated while in an ambulance at Erez/Beit Hanoun crossing, one over the phone and one on return to Gaza after treatment.

### Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 138 Gaza patients and 122 companions crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez in July to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 17 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 15 companions. During the month, Beit Hanoun/Erez crossing was open for 27 days for daytime working hours and closed on 4 days (4 Saturdays).



**150**  
recorded approvals  
for patient permits



**138**  
patients  
crossed Beit Hanoun/  
Erez for healthcare



**122**  
patient companions  
patient companions  
crossed Beit Hanoun/  
Erez



**3**  
patients  
called for security  
interrogation

## Rafah crossing - Egypt



In July, there were 6 entries and 0 exits through Rafah. The terminal was open for return for 3 days during the month. 4 people entered and 2 bodies of deceased persons were returned.

## The West Bank

In July, an unknown number of applications were submitted to Israeli authorities for permits for patients and their companions from the West Bank.

In the context of the permits system imposed by Israel, and following suspension of coordination of permit applications between Palestinian and Israeli authorities on 19 May, patients and companions from the West Bank are no longer applying through the Palestinian Civil Affairs Office for permits to enter East Jerusalem and Israel and instead have been applying directly to Israeli authorities present in the West Bank and through hospitals. Currently, there is no comprehensive data available for patient and companion permit applications to Israeli authorities.

Of health service providers, August Victoria Hospital reported the approval of 661 West Bank patient permits to reach its services. Meanwhile, Makassed Hospital reported receiving 278 in-patients to its hospital from the West Bank outside East Jerusalem. The hospital estimated that 30% of these patients were coordinated by Makassed and brought by ambulance, while 70% arrived to the hospital after direct application to Israeli authorities. St John Hospital reported that 845 West Bank patients (240 in-patients; 605 out-patients) reached its services.

Physicians for Human Rights Israel reported coordinating permits for one child patient and their parent, as well as for one companion to reach a patient who had already travelled.

No numbers were available for permit applications and approvals for patient companions.



No comprehensive data available for West Bank patient and companion permit applications following suspension to functioning of Civil Affairs Office;

662 patient permits were recorded as approved for travel to Augusta Victoria Hospital, including an application through Physicians for Human Rights Israel. A further 1,123 West Bank patients were reported to have reached Makassed and St John Hospitals in East Jerusalem.



## In Focus

### Patients in the Gaza Strip continue to face major barriers to accessing healthcare

59-year old Adel still waiting for his cancer treatment

Adel is a 59-year-old man from Gaza City who was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma in November 2017. He received initial treatment at Rantisi Hospital in Gaza and then was referred to Assuta Hospital in Israel and Najah Hospital in the West Bank for investigations and chemotherapy treatment that were unavailable in the Gaza Strip. In his last journey for treatment at Najah hospital on 11 November 2019, Adel received chemotherapy treatment and stem cell collection in advance of planned bone marrow transplant treatment. He remained in the hospital for around five months. In March 2020, a CT scan at Najah Hospital showed enlarged lymph nodes in Adel's neck, indicating potential recurrence of his disease. Adel was advised to stay at Najah Hospital to receive chemotherapy until he received his bone marrow transplant, but he missed his family and decided to return to Gaza between his treatments.

Adel returned to Gaza on 22 April and stayed in quarantine for three weeks. In his final week of quarantine, his condition



deteriorated. He was referred for care at Rantisi Hospital in Gaza City, where investigations revealed the disease was affecting his bladder. Doctors recommended that he receive chemotherapy treatment, as well as a PET scan to check progress of his disease and referral to follow up his planned bone marrow transplant.

PET scan technology and bone marrow transplantation are unavailable in Gaza, so Adel was referred for an appointment at Najah Hospital on 2 June 2020. However, he missed his appointment after being unable to apply for a permit following the end of coordination between Palestinian and Israeli authorities. Adel said, "I had an appointment but I didn't know where to apply for a permit or who could help me." He received a further appointment for 10 June and applied for a permit through the Palestinian Center for Human Rights. Adel didn't receive a response to this application and he lost his appointment a second time.

The Services Purchasing Unit of the Ministry of Health advised Adel to change his referral to Haya Specialized Hospital (HSH) in the Gaza Strip, so that he could at least receive the chemotherapy treatment he needed. His initial appointment was for 1 July, but the chemotherapy medicines he needed were not available until 19 July. Adel finally received his treatment on that date, after more than a month and a half of trying to navigate the bureaucratic maze of permits and referrals.

Following further treatment in early August, Adel was admitted to Rantisi Hospital in Gaza City with pain on 26 August. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in the Gaza Strip, Adel has been quarantined in hospital for 14 days, ending 9 September.

Adel said, "I don't mind receiving the treatment I need inside or outside Gaza; the important thing for me is to receive treatment on time. I was delayed 19 days in the previous cycle [because of lack of availability in Gaza]... How long must I wait? As patients, we have a right to get the treatment we need."

Adel is a father and worked as a labourer before he fell ill. He has been unable to work since his diagnosis.

## A young man died while awaiting exit for medical treatment

Jalal Al-Sharafi, a 22-year-old from the Tuffah neighborhood in Gaza, died on Sunday 19 July while awaiting exit for medical treatment.

Jalal was diagnosed with aplastic anaemia in March this year, after which he received initial treatment at Al-Rantisi Hospital in the Gaza Strip. However, Jalal did not respond to this treatment. On 4 May, he was referred for bone marrow transplantation at Tel Hashomer Hospital in Israel. His appointment was for 12 July, but he was denied an Israeli permit to exit through Erez/Beit Hanoun checkpoint. Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHRI) intervened to get him a permit and his appointment was rescheduled for 16 July. For this appointment, Jalal was approved a permit to cross Erez/Beit Hanoun, but his mother – who planned to accompany him – was denied. PHRI intervened again and had a permit approved for another companion, but it was too late in the day to coordinate an ambulance. Jalal's appointment was postponed to 19 July. However, Jalal's health deteriorated on the day he was supposed to travel, and he died at Rantisi Hospital at around 2pm. He never received the treatment he needed.

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## A bone marrow donor arrested at Erez

Abdullah, a 38-year-old man from Rafah, was arrested at 1 pm on 6 July 2020 at Erez/Beit Hanoun checkpoint. Abdullah was traveling to Tel HaShomer Hospital, where he was scheduled for a bone marrow donation for his sick brother (Hani), who was hospitalized at Tel-Hashomir.

Hani, Abdullah's older brother, is 45 years old who was diagnosed with leukemia in March 2020. He had his first appointment for bone marrow transplant preparation on 11 May 2020, when he was told to look for a donor from his family. Blood samples were taken from different family members in Gaza and were sent to Tel-Hashomer. Abdullah was a match and traveled for this reason on 8 July, when he was arrested. Abdullah was subsequently brought to the hospital for bone marrow donation on Sunday 12 July, and the prosecution pledged to bring him to the hospital as needed.

Hani received the bone marrow transplant from his brother, Abdullah, on 22 August. However, he died on 24 August 2020 from complications of his illness.