



In April, only 70% of patients who applied received permits to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint. (Above: Nasser hospital outpatient waiting room) ©WHO

Health Access for Referral Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: 4 (June 6, 2016)

Summary: April 2016

Erez crossing

- **Approval rates for patients' permits drop:** 70.9% of 1,944 patient applications submitted for permits to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in April were approved. 146 patients (7.5%), including three children and five elderly persons over 60 years, were denied; 420 patients (21.6%), including 120 children and 47 elderly people over 60, received no response to their applications (Palestinian District Liaison office in Gaza).
- **High number of patients requested for security interview (GSS):** 106 patients, among them 49 females, were requested for GSS interviews during April (**page 7**).
- **Approval rates for patient companions' permit applications drop to 6 in 10 (**page 5**).**
- **A patient arrested** in GSS interview at Erez (**page 7**).
- **Restricted access to humanitarian workers through Erez (**page 7**).**

Rafah exit

- **No access to Egypt during April:** According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was closed totally during the month. No medical delegates or medical aid entered Gaza through Egypt during the month.

Ministry of Health Referrals in April

- Ministry of Health referred **1,905 patients** in April to outside care with an estimated cost of **NIS 8,349,514**. The top 5 needed procedures for Gaza patients were in oncology, hematology, heart catheterization, ophthalmology, and pediatrics.

REFERRALS

Referrals of Gaza patients¹

The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 1,905 referrals¹ for Gaza patients in April, according to the Medical Referral Directorate data in Ramallah (**Table 1**), slightly lower than the monthly average in 2015.

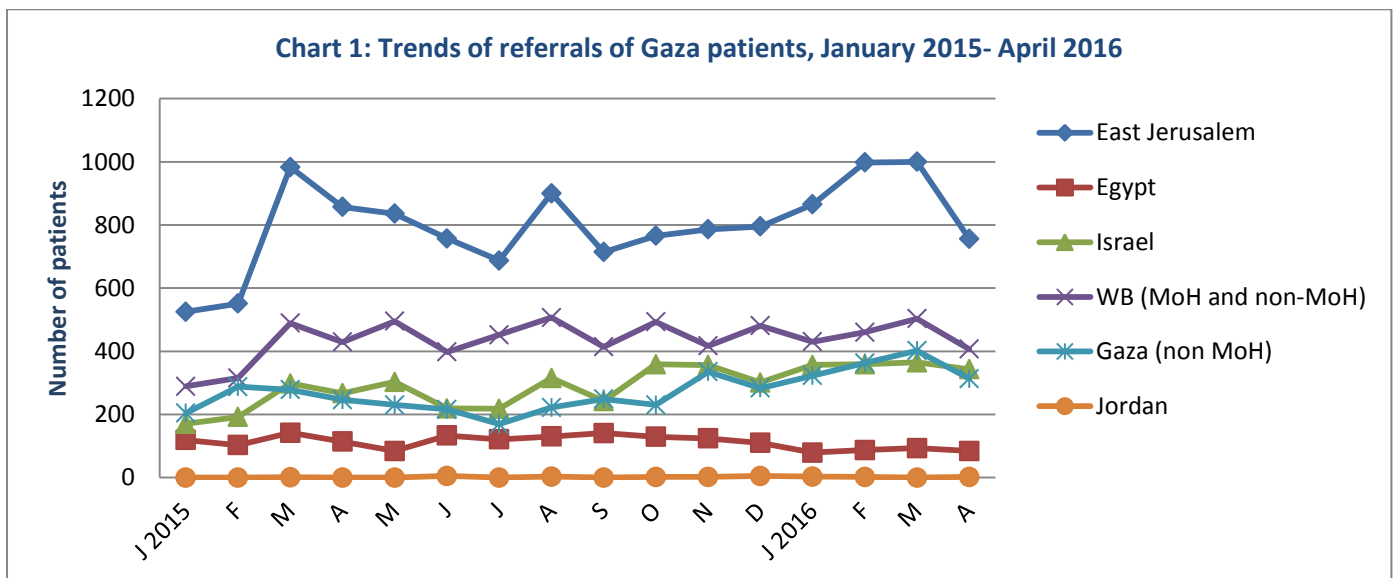
Most referrals were to East Jerusalem hospitals (39.6%); the remaining were distributed to West Bank hospitals (21.3%), Israeli hospitals (18%), within Gaza (16.4%), and referrals to Egypt (4.4%) remained low due to limited access.

Referral Destination	2015 monthly average	Jan	Feb	March	April	Total 2016
Gaza (non-MoH)	251	323	363	402	313	1,401
WB (MoH and non-MoH)	477	430	460	503	407	1,800
East Jerusalem	809	865	998	1,000	756	3,619
Jordan	3	3	2	0	2	7
Israel	312	357	359	365	343	1,424
Egypt	139	79	84	93	84	343
Total	1,991	2,057	2,269	2,363	1,905	8,594

Source: MoH Medical Referral Directorate, Ramallah, June 7, 2016.¹

Compared to the previous month, referrals dropped to all destinations, except Jordan. Compared to the 2015 monthly average, referrals dropped to all but two destinations, to Israeli hospitals and to non-MoH facilities within Gaza. (**Table 1** and **Chart 1**).

There was a gender gap in April referrals: 45.93% of referrals issued for Gaza patients were for females while 54.07% were for males. 29.82% of all referrals were for children under the age of 18 while 19.42% were for elderly patients over 60 years old.



The specialties needed for Gaza referrals were mainly: oncology - 351 referrals (18.43%), hematology - 142 (7.45%), heart catheterization - 132 (6.93%), ophthalmology - 130 (6.82%), pediatrics - 124 (6.51%), MRI - 123 (6.46%), orthopedics - 113 (5.93%), nuclear medicine - 107 (5.62%), internal medicine - 80 (4.20%), cardiology - 62 (3.25%). The remaining 541 (28.40%) were for 23 other specialties. The Referral Directorate in Ramallah reported an estimated cost of **NIS 8,349,514** for the 1,905 referrals for Gaza patients in April.

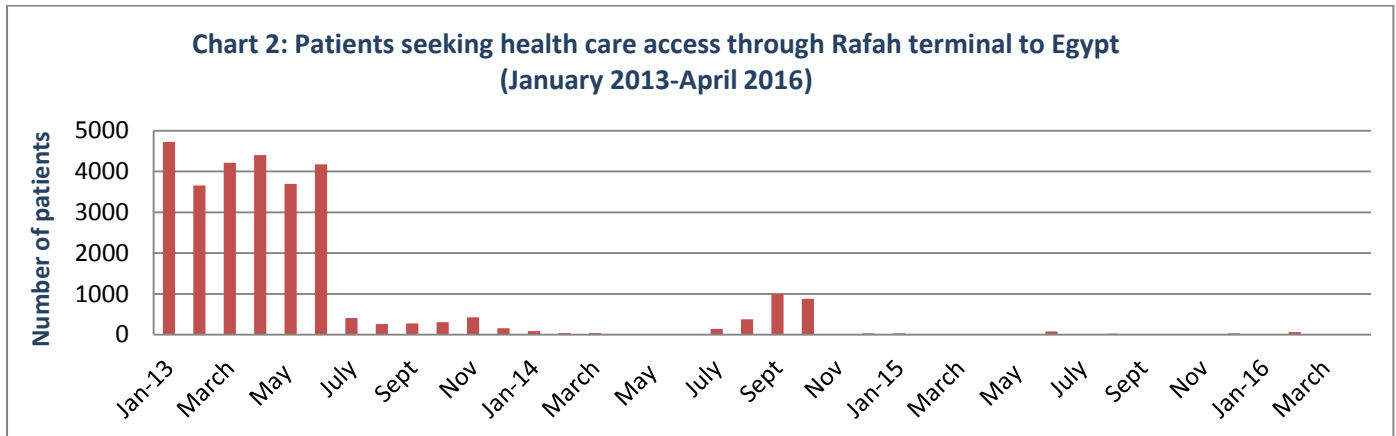
¹ The referral data used in the WHO monthly reports since October 2015 is obtained from the Ministry of Health Medical Referral Directorate in Ramallah and reflect the number of financial decisions for Gaza patients, rather than the number of actual patients. The data includes renewals of referrals for Gaza patients to Egypt who are still waiting for access through Rafah, approvals for additional financial coverage needed for in-patients in hospital, and special additional referrals.

ACCESS

Of the 1,905 patients issued Ministry of Health referrals in April, 1,508 (79.16%) required Israeli permits for access through Erez checkpoint and 84 (4.41%) required approval from Egypt to exit through Rafah (and required the Rafah border to be accessible).

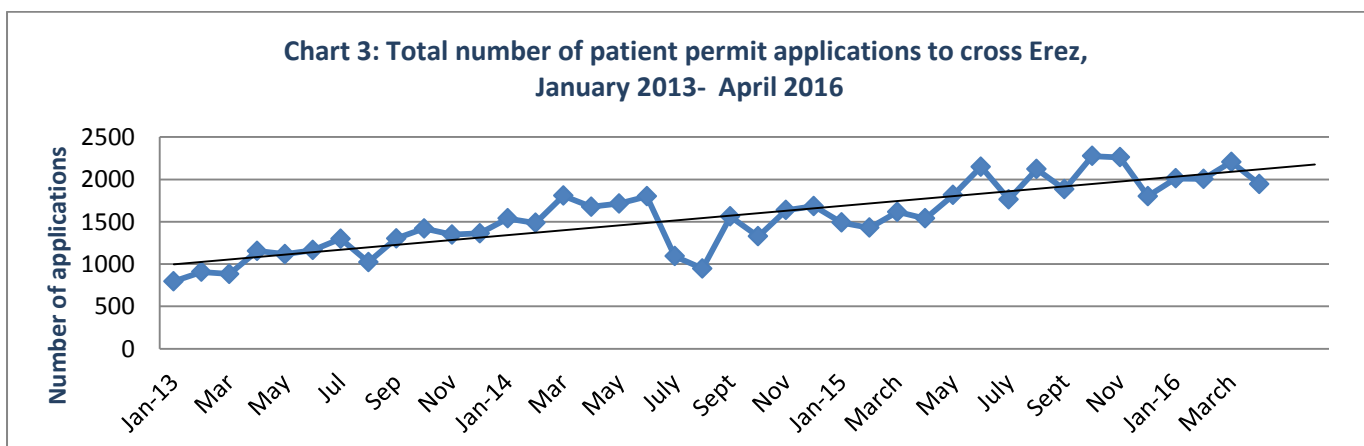
No access to Egypt during April: According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was closed both directions during April. No patients were allowed to cross into Egypt and no medical delegates or medical aid entered Gaza during the month.

In the first four months of 2016, the Rafah crossing was open only 3 days for humanitarian cases, allowing only 62 patients to travel into Egypt for health care. Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4,000 Gaza residents crossed Rafah terminal to Egypt monthly for health-related reasons (**Chart 2**).



Access through Erez crossing: In April, there were 1,944 applications from patients for permits to cross Erez for health care (53.76% males and 46.24% females). 32% were applications for children under 18 years and 15.5% were for elderly people above 60. Permit applications submitted this month were mainly for patients who need health care in oncology, 436 (22.43%), pediatrics, 211 (10.85%), cardiology, 196 (10.08%), orthopedics, 156 (8.02%), ophthalmology, 142 (7.3%), hematology, 142 (7.3%), neurosurgery, 111 (5.71%), nuclear medicine, 91 (4.68%), urology 68 (3.5%) and general surgery, 66 (3.4%). The remaining 325 (16.72%) applications were for 16 other specialties.

Of the total permit applications, 1,010 (51.95%) were for patients destined to hospitals in East Jerusalem, 542 (27.88%) to the West Bank, 376 (19.34%) to Israel, and 16 (0.82%) to Jordan. The top receiving hospitals in April were Makassed, 535 (27.52%), Augusta Victoria, 323 (16.62%), Najah University in Nablus, 193 (9.93%), Tel-Hashomir 134 (6.89%), Al-Ahli hospital in Hebron, 127 (6.53%), St. John hospital, 100 (5.14%), Msalam center, 72 (3.7%), Hadassah, 59 (3.03%), St. Joseph, 52 (2.67%) and Ichilov in Tel-aviv, 42 (2.16%).



The total number in April was 5.4% higher than the monthly average in 2015 (1,845). In the past 3 years (**Chart 3**) there has been a trend toward higher demand for access to health care through Erez due to lack of resources in the health system in Gaza and blocked access to Egypt, especially for private patients.

The process of applying for a permit is time-consuming for the patient and complicated, sometimes requiring multiple attempts which delays health care. The patient must have a valid financial commitment from the Palestinian MoH and documentation of an appointment from the receiving hospital. If the validity of either expires before the patient receives a permit, the application process must be repeated. Patients sometimes reapply after being denied a permit, or if the treatment is urgent and no response has been received. April data showed that out of the 1,944 applications submitted in the Palestinian coordination office, 121 (6.2%) applications were repeated attempts: 3 attempts for 1 patient, and 2 attempts for 121.

In April, the Palestinian District Coordination office reported that 1,378 (70.88%) applications for permits for patients were approved (**Table 2**), 5.72% lower than the monthly average in 2015. 146 applicants (7.51%) were denied access. 420 (21.61%) did not receive an answer to their applications in time for their hospital appointments and therefore suffered delay in health care.

Permit applications should be submitted to the Israeli district liaison office 7-10 days prior to the hospital appointment date. In April, out of the total 1,944 applications from patients with hospital appointments scheduled during the month, 227 (11.68%) were submitted less than a week before the referral hospital appointment date, 622 (32%) applications were submitted 8-14 days before the appointment, 1,057 (54.37%) were 15-30 days before, and 37 (1.9%) were more than 30 days before the hospital appointment. One application not accounted for.

Table 2: Israeli responses to permit requests to cross Erez, by age, sex and GSS interviews, April 2016

Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Called by GSS*	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	100	133	85	113	0	1	15	19	0	0
4 - 17	162	225	123	176	1	1	38	48	2	0
18- 40	233	262	155	134	23	67	55	61	28	20
41 - 60	270	258	201	142	15	33	54	83	19	31
Over 60	134	167	116	133	0	5	18	29	0	6
Sub-total	899	1,045	680	698	39	107	180	240	49	57
Total	1,944		1,378 (70.88%)		146 (7.51%)		420 (21.61%)		106 (5.45%)	

* GSS = Israeli General Security Services

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH –Gaza

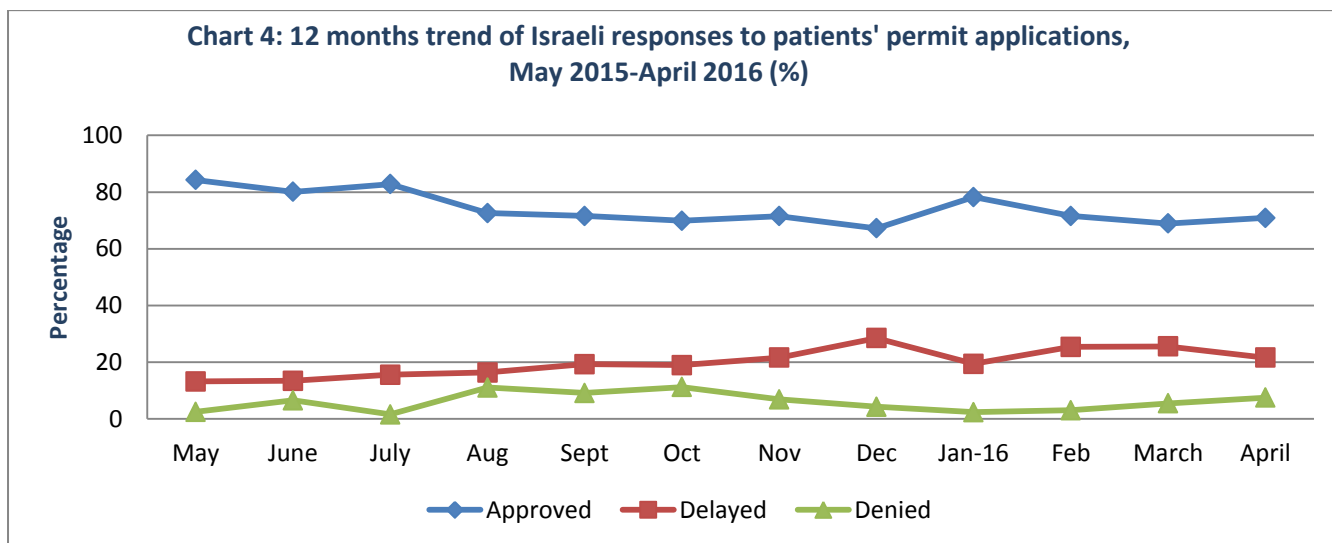
Table 3 shows that total patient permit applications in April 2016 were 26.3% higher than the corresponding month in 2015 while the approval rate was 12.2% lower. Denial rate was more than 6 times higher in April 2016 while delayed rate was 5.8 % higher. The total number of permit applications in the period January- April 2016 was 34.5% higher than the corresponding period in 2015 but the approval rate was 9.3% lower. The number of patients requested for security interview in the same period was more than 5.5 folds higher.

Table 3: Israeli District Liaison Office decisions on permit requests to cross Erez, by response, and sex of applicant, 2016 compared to 2015

Period	April 2015		April 2016		January -April 2015		January–April 2016	
Total	1,539 (F:724; M:815)		1,944 (F:899; M:1045)		6,072 (F:2,789; M:3,283)		8,166 (F:3,925;M:4,241)	
Approved	1,278 (F:617; M:661)	83.04%	1,378 (F:680; M:698)	70.88%	4,957 (F:2,390; M:2,567)	81.64%	5,907 (F:3,008;M:2,899)	72.34%
Denied	18 (F:6; M:12)	1.17%	146 (F:39; M:107)	7.51%	160 (F:31; M:129)	2.63%	375 (F:115;M:260)	4.59%
Delayed	243 (F:101; M:142)	15.79%	420 (F:180; M:240)	21.61%	955 (F:368; M:587)	15.73%	1,884 (F:802;M:1,082)	23.07%
-- of which called for GSS interrogation (of total applicants)	19 (F:4;M:15)	1.23%	106 (F:49; M:57)	5.45%	68 (F:19; M:49)	1.12%	371 (F:133;M:238)	4.54%

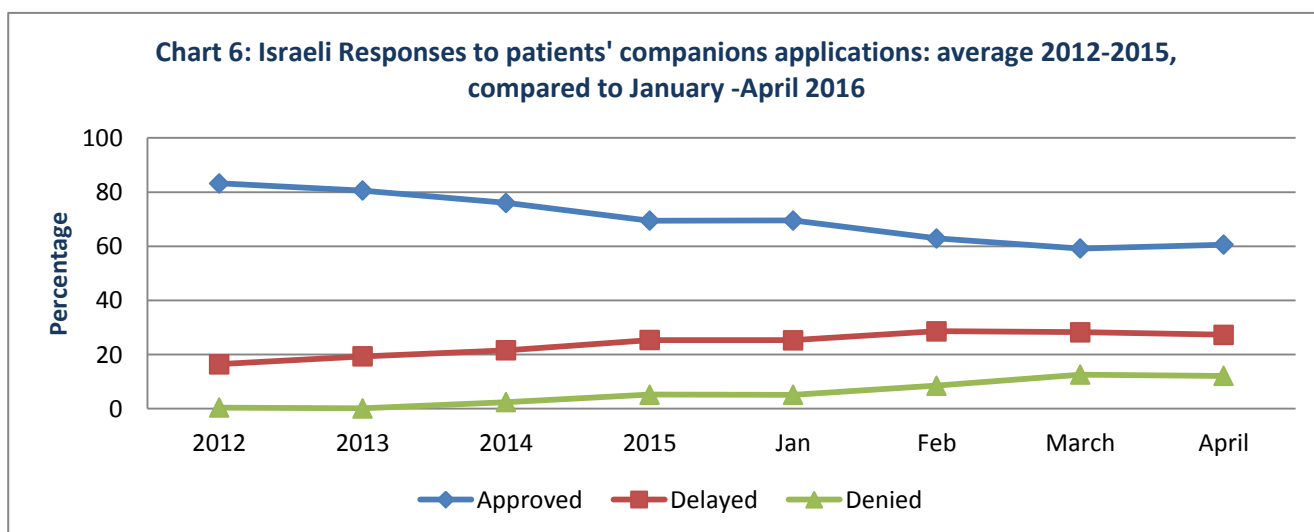
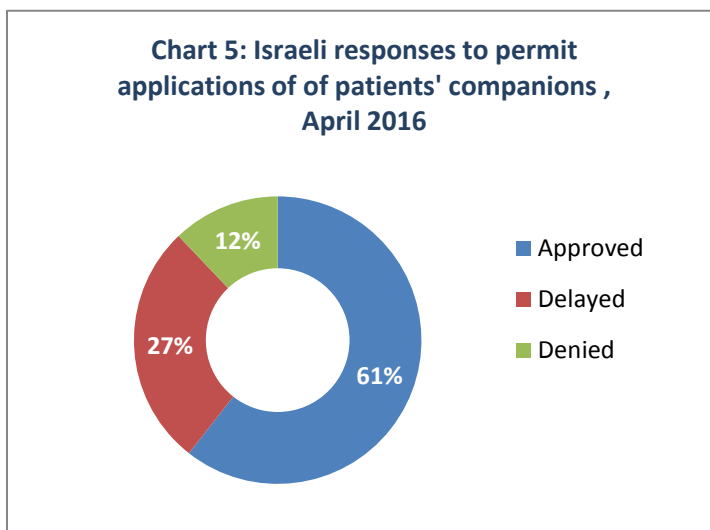
Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Chart 4 shows a decline after July 2015 in Israeli approvals for patients' permit applications and an increase in delays. Delays were higher in 2016 compared to the 2015 average, possibly due to an increase in GSS requests for security interviews.



Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Patients' companions: In April, 2,106 applications for relatives accompanying patients (including parents of children) were submitted to the Israeli authorities. 61% were approved, 8% lower than the average for 2015. 12% were denied and 27% were pending (**chart 5**). Only one first-degree relative is permitted and permits are now conditional on security clearance for those aged up to 55 years. **Chart 6** shows a steady decline in the approval rates for patients' companions from January 2012 to April 2016. Denials and delays in responses to companions' applications have increased correspondingly in the same period.



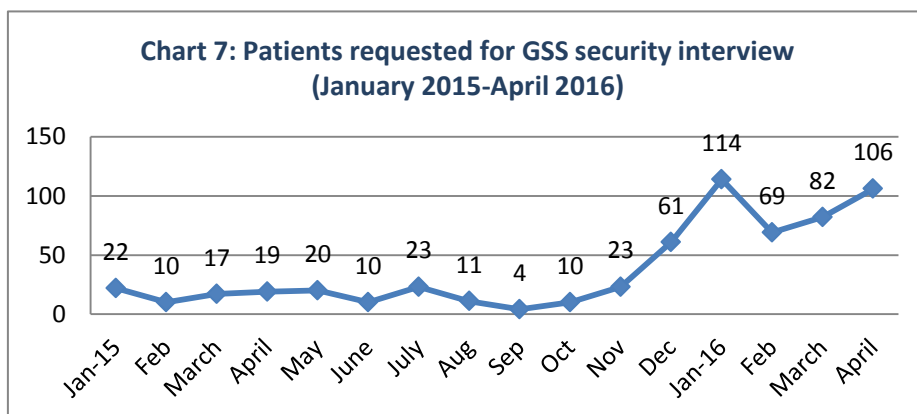
Financial coverage: 93.93% of all patients applying for Israeli permits in April were referred by the Palestinian MoH, 2.21% were self-funded, and 1.39% were funded by Nour Al-Alam foundation, 0.98% by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, 0.67% by Peres Center for Peace, 0.36% by Doctors Without Borders, 0.31% by the Military Medical Services, and 0.15% by other organizations.

Denied care: 146 patients (107 males; 39 females) were denied permits to access through Erez, including 3 children and 5 patients over 60 years old. April represented the highest number of patients denied in one month since November 2015 when 155 patients were denied. Of the denied patients, 128 patients had appointments in East Jerusalem and West Bank hospitals, 14 in Israel and 4 in Jordan. 135 were financially covered by the Palestinian MoH, 4 were self-funded, 4 by the Doctors Without Borders, 2 were funded by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel and one by the Military Medical Services. Of those denied: 27.4% (40) had waited for a response for 8-14 days; 70.55% (103) waited 15-30 days; and 1 (0.68%) patients waited more than 30 days. The denied patients had appointments for: orthopedics (40); neurosurgery (26); ophthalmology (12); urology and nuclear medicine (9) each; cardiology and oncology (7) each; ENT and hematology (6) each; and general surgery (5). The remaining 19 were for 14 other specialties.

Delayed care: 420 patients (240 males; 180 females) were delayed in reaching health care in April, among them 120 children and 47 patients over the age of 60; they received no response to their applications and consequently lost their hospital appointments. Of the 420 patients delayed, 82.62% had scheduled appointments in East Jerusalem or West Bank hospitals, 16.43% in Israel, and 0.95% in Jordan. The delayed patients had scheduled appointments in: oncology (66); cardiology (50); orthopedics (42); ophthalmology (41); pediatrics (39); nuclear medicine (27); hematology (26); neurosurgery (25); general surgery (16); urology (15); vascular surgery and internal medicine (12) each; heart surgery (10); endocrinology (8); gynecology/obstetrics (7); nephrology (6); neurology and ENT (5) each; ICU, lab analysis, maxillofacial surgery, and plastic surgery (2) each. Out of 420 delayed patient applicants, 7.86% had submitted their applications 1-7 days prior to the appointment date. However, 33.57% waited 8-14 days, 55.24% waited 15-30 days and 3.1% waited more than 30 days for a response to their permit request. One application was missed. 26 patients out of the delayed were eventually approved late, within the first 2 weeks of May 2016.

Security Interviews: 106 patients (57 males; 49 females), 98 aged between 18-60, 2 under age of 18, and 6 over 60, were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS). Of 106 patients requested for interviews, 21 were oncology patients, 11 neurosurgery, 11 cardiology, 10 nuclear medicine, 7 hematology, 7 ophthalmology, 7 pediatrics, 6 general surgery, 4 orthopedics, 3 urology, 3 neurology, 2 neurology, 2 heart surgery, 2 internal medicine, 2 vascular surgery, 1 gynecology/obstetrics, 1 endocrinology and 1 plastic surgery. The number of patients requested for a security interview as a condition to process their permit applications has increased dramatically since November 2015 (**Chart 7**). April figures were more than 5 times the monthly average of 2015 and the third highest monthly number since November 2009 when 122 patients were requested for GSS.

The increase in the number of females requested for GSS interviews, according to the Palestinian civil affairs and the district liaison office, might be attributed to a recent change of intelligence officer personnel at Erez and to a widening of the age group for security clearance of companions from 16-35 years to 16-55 years.



Patients and companions cross Erez: The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,340 Gaza patients (and 1,279 companions) crossed Erez in April to access hospitals in the West Bank including Jerusalem, Israeli hospitals, or Jordanian hospitals; of these, 94 patients were transferred by ambulance (using two ambulances and back-to-back procedures), with 92 companions. Erez crossing was open for 25 days during regular daytime working hours and closed for 5 days (5 Saturdays) in April.

Surgical patient arrested during GSS security interview

Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights in Gaza reported that a patient was arrested at Erez crossing by the Israeli authorities at approximately 9:00 a.m. on 18 April 2016. Mahmoud Abu Fool, 19, a resident of Jabalia camp in North Gaza went to Erez crossing for a security interview that was requested by the Israeli security after he applied for a permit for health access. Mahmoud was scheduled to continue medical treatment at Al Najah Hospital in Nablus in the West Bank where he had previously been treated for a torn artery in his leg caused by injury from live ammunition during a protest on 9 October 2015, east of Gaza City. On 15 October 2015, he was transferred to Al Najah Hospital in the West Bank for a grafting operation to repair the artery and leg fracture.

When Mahmoud applied for a travel permit to continue his treatment in Al Najah Hospital, he was requested to appear for an interview with Israeli security at Erez crossing on 18 April 2016 at 8:30 a.m. At 10 p.m. that evening, the family was contacted by the Palestinian Authority of Civil Affairs and informed of Mahmoud's arrest. Mahmoud's father told WHO that his son was detained in an Israeli prison in Bir Saba'. "They will take him for a trial on June 1,* I am extremely worried about his leg condition. He had a difficult surgery and nobody will treat him there in the prison. The ICRC could not visit him and of course no one from the family has been able to," said the father.

**postponed to June 17*

Humanitarian health staff face increased access difficulties

In April the WHO submitted a total of 70 applications for health personnel to leave or to enter the Gaza Strip. Only 34 (48.6%) applications were approved. 2 (2.94%) WHO staff were denied and the remaining 34 (48.6%) were pending

Table 4: Humanitarian health staff access permits in/out of Gaza, April 2016

	Total	Approved	Denied	Pending
Out of Gaza: WHO staff	16	6	2	8
Out of Gaza: MoH, Health Cluster partners	47	24	0	23
Into Gaza: WHO staff (Jerusalem ID-holders)	4	1	0	3
Into Gaza: International medical delegates	3	3	0	0
Total	70	34 (48.57%)	2 (2.86%)	34 (48.57%)