



Young teenager dies after being denied health access

Ahmed Shbair, a 17 year-old boy with a congenital heart condition, died in Gaza on January 14, 2017, following his inability to obtain a permit to travel for urgent surgery in Israel where he had been receiving care. His family had applied four times for a permit since November 3, 2016, and both he and his mother were interrogated by Israeli security services as a condition of the request. Two requests were denied and his third request went unanswered. After losing three previous hospital dates without receiving a permit, Ahmed made a new appointment and applied a fourth time in January 2017. However, Ahmed's condition deteriorated suddenly in the early morning of January 14, and he had difficulty breathing. His family brought him to Shifa hospital emergency department but Ahmed died soonafter. Ahmed had been keen to graduate from secondary school in June 2017, said his father.



Health Access for Referral Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: 1 (Published March 23, 2017)

Summary: January 2017

Difficult access through Erez crossing

- More than half of patients were denied/delayed permits: Of 2,792 patient applications for a permit to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in January, 46.95% were approved and 53.05% were denied/delayed. 98 patients (3.51%) were denied permits, among them 6 children less than 18 and 8 persons over 60 years; 1,383 (49.53%) received no response including 320 children and 92 people over 60 (Palestinian District Liaison office in Gaza).
61.4% of patients' companions were denied/ delayed permits: The approval rate for permit applications of patient companions was 38.6%; 5.85% of the companions were denied permits and the remaining 55.6% were still pending by the patients' scheduled hospital dates.
Security interrogations for patients: 35 patients (24 males; 11 females) including 2 children were requested by the General Security Services for interviews at Erez during January. 8 were approved.

Rafah exit eased

- Access to Egypt improved: According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was open in both directions for 4 days in January allowing 490 patients to travel for health reasons to Egypt.

Humanitarian health workers access through Erez

Table with 5 columns: Requests, Approved, Denied, Pending. Rows include WHO for Jerusalem staff to enter, WHO for Gaza staff to exit, WHO for Health Cluster partners, International medical delegates, and Total.

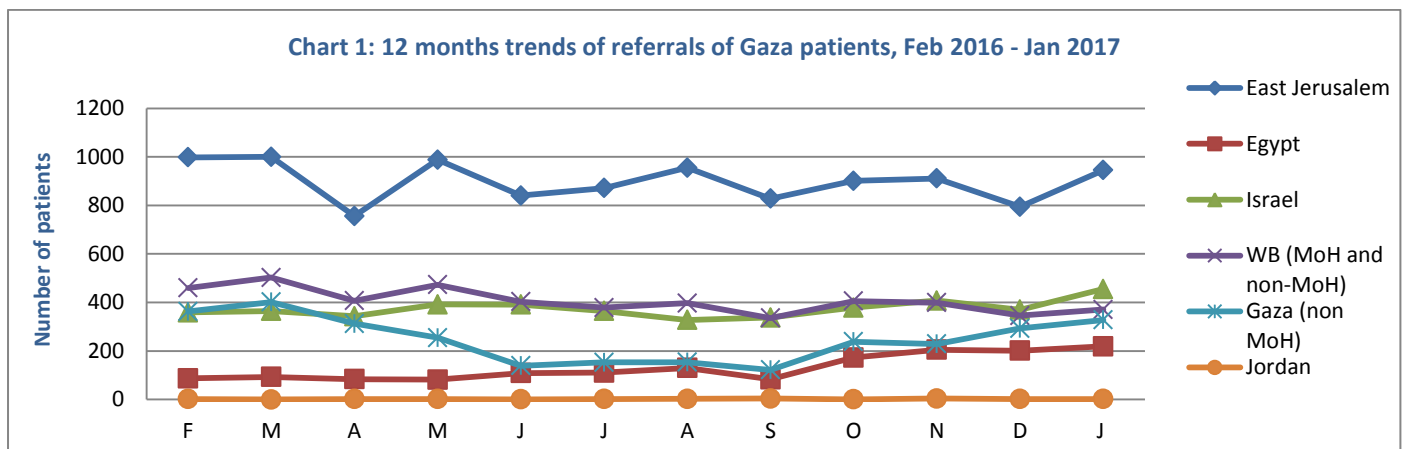
Ministry of Health Referrals

Financial coverage: The Ministry of Health issued 2,320 referral decisions for 2,029 Gaza patients (45.56% female patients and 54.44% male patients) in January for outside care with an estimated cost of NIS 9,844,096. The top 5 needed specialties for Gaza patients were in oncology, haematology, paediatrics, heart catheterization, and ophthalmology.

Table 1: Ministry of Health Referrals in January 2017

| Medical Referral | Number of patients | Percentage | | Number of patients | Percentage |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Oncology | 527 | 22.72% | Orthopaedics | 104 | 4.48% |
| Haematology | 203 | 8.75% | MRI | 92 | 3.97% |
| Paediatrics | 160 | 6.90% | Internal medicine | 88 | 3.79% |
| Heart catheterization | 154 | 6.64% | Cardiology | 86 | 3.71% |
| Ophthalmology | 151 | 6.51% | 21 other specialties | 633 | 27.27% |
| Nuclear medicine | 122 | 5.26% | Total | 2,320 | 100% |

Chart 1: 12 months trends of referrals of Gaza patients, Feb 2016 - Jan 2017



1,773 referrals (76.4%) required Israeli permits for access through Erez checkpoint and 219 (9.4%) required approval from Egypt to exit through Rafah (and the Rafah border to be accessible).

ACCESS

Rafah Crossing: Limited access to Egypt during January: According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was open on 4 days during January for humanitarian cases. Of the 2,324 travellers who crossed to Egypt, 490 reported they were travelling for health reasons with 262 companions, the highest number of travellers for health reasons since June 2015. 10 of the patients, with 14 companions, were transferred by ambulance. No medical aid or medical delegates entered Gaza during the month. In the year 2016, the Rafah crossing has been open only 38 days for humanitarian cases, allowing only 1,690 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.

Erez Crossing: Permit approval rates was 15.7% lower than the average approval rate of 2016: In January, there were 2,792 applications from patients for permits to cross Erez for health care. About 27% (755) of patient applications in January were repeat applications by patients to cross Erez: 5 attempts for 2 patient, 4 attempts for 3 patients, 3 attempts for 33 patients and 2 attempts for 317 patients. The remaining 73% (2,037) applications represented single attempts by patients during the month.

The top receiving hospitals in January were Makassed, 659 (23.6%) and Augusta Victoria, 635 (22.7%) in East Jerusalem; Najah University in Nablus 182 (6.5%); Tel-Hashomir, 173 (6.2%) and Hadassah, 166

Chart 2: Permit application destination, Jan 2017

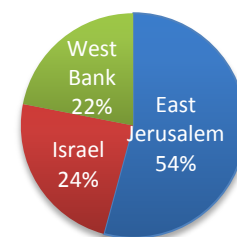
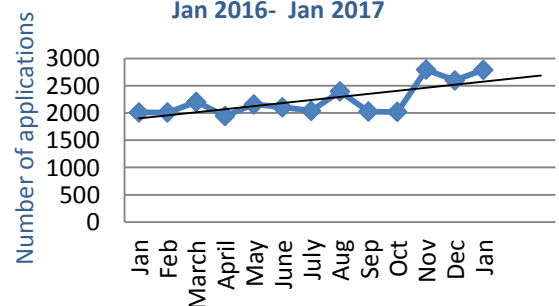
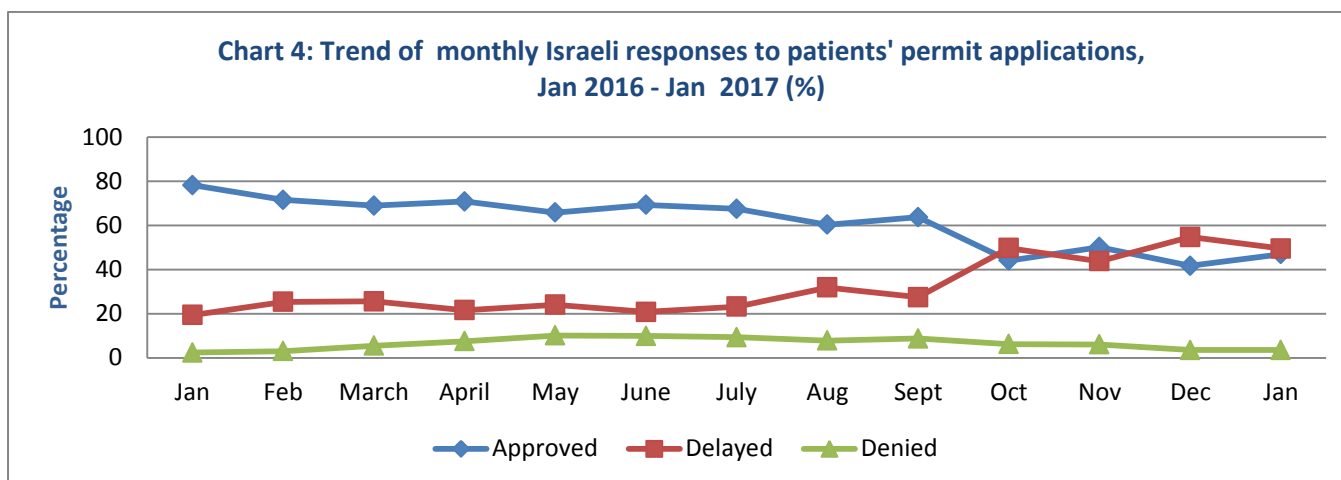


Chart 3: Trend of total number of patient permit applications to cross Erez Jan 2016- Jan 2017



(5.9%) in Israel; St. John hospital, 126 (4.5%) in East Jerusalem and Msalam center, 112 (4%) in Ramallah; St. Joseph hospital in Jerusalem 89 (3.2%); Assuta hospital, 89 (3.2%) and Ichilov hospital 85 (3%) in Israel. The remaining 476 (17%) were to 29 other hospitals and medical centers.

In January, the Palestinian District Coordination office reported that only 46.96% of applications for patients' permits were approved, 15.7% lower than the monthly average of the year 2016 (**Chart 4**). 98 applicants (3.51%) were denied access, 1,383 (49.53%) applications were pending and patients lost their hospital appointments, delaying their medical care. 35 patients were requested for security interviews with the Israeli security.



Of the 2,792 patients applying for permits to cross Erez, 93.8% received referrals from the Ministry of Health, 3.1% were self-funded, 2.1% were supported by Noor Ala Al-alam charity and the remaining 1% by other organizations.

Denied care: 98 patients (63 males; 35 females) were denied permits to access through Erez, including 6 children under age of 18 and 8 patients over 60 years old. The following specialties were needed by patients who were denied permits: orthopedics (23); oncology (12); ophthalmology (9); ENT (8); general surgery and cardiology (7) each; internal medicine (5); the remaining 27 were for 14 other specialties.

Delayed care: 1,383 patients (752 males; 631 females) were delayed in reaching health care in January, the second highest number of patient applications delayed ever, among them 320 children and 92 patients over the age of 60; those delayed received no response to their applications and consequently lost their scheduled hospital appointments. The delayed patients (1,383) had treatment appointments in: oncology (318); ophthalmology (153); cardiology (136); orthopedics (114); haematology (109); pediatrics (102); neurosurgery (77); nuclear medicine (53); and the remaining 321 were for 19 other specialties.

Patients need to submit their applications at least 10 days prior to the hospital appointment. In January, out of the 1,383 delayed patients about 90% submitted their applications 10 days or more prior to the appointment date.

Patients' companions: In January, 3,094 applications for relatives accompanying patients (including parents of children) were submitted to the Israeli authorities. Only one first-degree relative is permitted to accompany a Gaza patient and permits are conditional on security clearance for all persons under the age of 55 years. Approval rates for patients' companions have declined steadily from 2012 to January 2017. In January 38.6% were approved, 5.9% were denied and 55.6% were delayed and pending, **Chart 5**.

Security interviews: 35 patients (24 males; 11 females), among them a young girl and a young boy less than 18 years and 2 men over 60 years were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS), 14 (40%) of them were oncology patients. Of the 35 patients requested by the GSS, 8 were approved after the interview. Statistics showed a significant increase of the number of patients requested for GSS since Dec 2015.

Patients and companions cross Erez: The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,179 Gaza patients (and 1,076 companions) crossed Erez in January to access Palestinian, Israeli, or Jordanian hospitals; of these, 78 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulances, with 73 companions. Erez crossing was open for 27 days during daytime working hours and closed on 4 days (4 Saturdays) in January.

For latest WHO annual report on access: [Right to health: Crossing barriers to access health in the occupied Palestinian territory, 2014–2015](#)

