

MONTHLY REPORT

Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip

August 2011



World Health
Organization

occupied Palestinian territory

Ref: RAD 7 (September 23, 2011)

Summary for August 2011

- A 33-year-old male patient with a valid permit was detained at Erez crossing.
- There was a reduced number of Erez permit applications from referred patients for treatment abroad, due to Muslim month of Ramadan and Eid al Fitr.
- 10% of applications of patients (including 7 children) for a permit to cross Erez were either denied or delayed.

Destinations and reasons for referral for medical treatment

During August 2011, the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) of the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) referred 1,391 patients to health facilities for specialized treatment not available in MoH facilities in Gaza: 357 patients were referred for specialized treatment within the Gaza Strip, in either NGO or private hospitals, and **1,034 patients were referred outside of Gaza** to hospitals in Egypt (32%), East Jerusalem (32%), Israel (23%), the West Bank (11%) and Jordan (2%). 706 patients required access through Erez crossing and 328 through Rafah border crossing.

The main reasons for 46% of all referrals, and 55% (\$11.9 million) of the estimated costs, in August were: cardiovascular (16%), oncology (13%), ophthalmology (6%), orthopedics (6%) and neurosurgery (5%).

Referral Destination	Table 1: Referrals by month*								Total
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	
Gaza (Non MoH facilities)	621	447	463	325	389	385	474	357	2,987
WB (MoH & NGOs)	70	86	77	111	126	132	135	109	711
East Jerusalem	294	280	345	268	318	302	337	331	2,138
Egypt	531	185	356	314	448	481	382	328	2,315
Jordan	22	27	17	16	20	16	21	25	143
Israel	246	260	312	243	283	276	241	241	2,102
Total	1,784	1,285	1,570	1,277	1,584	1,592	1,590	1391	

*Referrals are recorded according to month of scheduled hospital appointment. Source: MoH RAD Gaza.

Permit applications for patient referrals through Erez

During August 2011, the Israeli District Liaison Office (DCL) processed 668 patient applications for permits to cross Erez checkpoint to access hospitals in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, Israel and Jordan (see Table 1). This compares to 978 applications July 2011. The decreased number of applications in August was due to Ramadan and Eid al Fitr, when hospitals in East Jerusalem, Gaza (non MoH) and the West Bank, tend only to accept urgent cases since many staff members are on leave during the holiday.

92% of applications (615) were submitted and financially covered by MoH, 3% (20) by Peres Center for Peace, 2.5% (17) by Nour al Alam Foundation, and the remaining 2.5% (17) by other charity agencies or were self-funded.

Recently patients are receiving referrals due to the unavailability of drugs in the MoH hospitals in Gaza, e.g. a medication for Crohn's disease, an autoimmune condition; respiratory medications used for infants with certain respiratory disorders, specific chemotherapies used for cancer treatments. A 2% increase in oncology referrals was noted compared with the previous two months, due to shortages of chemotherapy drugs used to treat and reduce risk of reoccurrence of cancers.

Table 2: District Liaison Office decisions on permit requests to cross Erez (August 2011, disaggregated by age and sex)

Age group	Total		Approved*		Denied		Delayed**			
									Out of which called for GSS interrogation***	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
0 - 3	54	41	54	40	0	0	0	1	0	0
4 - 17	85	62	82	59	0	0	3	3	0	0
18 - 40	93	83	70	67	9	3	14	13	7	5
41 - 60	79	91	71	86	1	0	7	5	2	2
Over 60	40	40	35	37	0	1	5	2	2	0
Sub-total	351	317	312	289	10	4	29	24	11	7
Total	668		601 (90%)		14 (2%)		53 (8%)		18	

* Approvals are typically communicated to the patient only 24 hours in advance of their scheduled appointments.

** Permit applications for patient access through Erez can only be submitted within 10 days of hospital appointments. When there is no timely response from the Israeli Liaison Office, the applications are registered here as "delayed", meaning that the Palestinian Liaison Office received no response to the permit application prior to the patient's hospital appointment date. Some patients in this category may eventually receive permit approval --- but after their hospital appointment has passed. They must then reschedule their appointment. Other patients in this category may eventually receive denials or may not receive any response.

*** These are requests for interrogation as communicated by Israeli authorities through the Palestinian Liaison Office. This may be underreported since Israeli authorities sometimes contact patients directly for interrogation.

In August, **90%** (601 patients), of all applications were approved, a similar high rate as in July 2011, but substantially higher than the 2010 average of 78%. Of the remaining 10% of all patients 2% (14 cases) were denied permission to cross Erez checkpoint, half of the denied patients were referred for orthopedic interventions. Another 8% (53 patients, including 7 children) had their applications delayed beyond their hospital appointment.¹ Of the 53 patients whose applications were delayed by the Israeli authorities, 18 were called for interrogation by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS). **Following their interrogation 16 patients are still waiting for the GSS response, 1 was approved permit and 1 was denied permit.**

Delays in processing applications can be critical for patients who are waiting for urgent medical treatment. So far in 2011, **three patients died before receiving permits to travel to through Erez crossing to access the hospital they have been referred to. Some patients are detained by the Israeli authorities at Erez checkpoint, despite having obtained a permit to cross Erez** (see "Detention of Omar Mohammed Al Bareem" below). The increase in the number of patients seeking treatment in Egypt over other destinations, especially for males aged 18-40 years, may be due in part to increase their chances of exiting Gaza, and to avoid the personal security risks involved with applying for an Israeli permit through Erez. In 2010, only half of applications by males and two thirds by female in this group had their permit applications through Erez approved.

¹ Of these delayed patients 14 were referred for ophthalmic treatments, 10 orthopedic treatments, 5 neurosurgery, 4 heart surgery, 2 oncology treatment and the remaining for other specialties.

Erez and Rafah crossing data for August 2011

According to the Palestinian Liaison Officer at Erez, **584 patients** crossed Erez checkpoint during August 2011, of which 26 needed to be transported by ambulance. Because Palestinian ambulances are not permitted to leave Gaza, the patients were transferred from a Palestinian ambulance, carried on a stretcher to an Israeli ambulance at Erez checkpoint. This compares to 842 patients, including 51 via ambulances, in July.

Rafah border crossing was open for humanitarian reasons for 25 days throughout August 2011, closed for two days during Eid Al Fitr and during week-ends. An estimated **33 patients daily** (total of 1000) were able to leave Gaza through Rafah for treatment in Egypt. This includes patients who were seeking medical treatment at their own expense and, therefore, traveled without a RAD financially covered, referral document.

Detention of Omar Mohammed Al Bareem (33 years old)

Gaza resident **Omar Mohammed Al Bareem**, 33 years old and suffering from deep vein thrombosis in his leg, was referred to East Jerusalem by his treating physicians and obtained an appointment at Makassed Hospital for August 10, 2011.

On July 31, 2011, Mr Al Bareem submitted an application for a permit to cross Erez for the day of his appointment. Mr Al Bareem's permit request was approved, and he travelled on August 10 to Erez crossing. However, Mr Al Bareem was detained by the Israeli authorities during the crossing process. His family appealed to the ICRC and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) for assistance. Mr Al Bareem was detained in Ashkelon prison for 19 days and was released on August 29. Mr Al Bareem was not able to access the hospital he has been referred to, and is now applying for referral to Egypt.

Annex 1: Data from January to August for 2010 and 2011

District Liaison Office decisions on permit requests to cross Erez (total number and %, by response and by sex of applicant)									
Period	August 2010		August 2011		January – August 2010		January – August 2011		
Total	905 (F:404; M:501)		668 (F:317; M:351)		7,991 (F:2960; M:4174)		7,403 (F:3240; M:4163)		
Approved	771 (F:364; M:407)	85.2%	601 (F:289; M:312)	90.0%	6,488 (F:2899; M:3589)	81.2%	6,558 (F:2970; M:3588)		88.6%
Denied	86 (F:27; M:59)	9.5%	14 (F:4; M:10)	2.1%	579 (F:168; M:411)	7.2%	183 (F:40; M:143)		2.5%
Delayed	48 (F:13; M:35)	5.3%	53 (F:24; M:29)	7.9%	924 (F:284; M:640)	11.6%	662 (F:228; M:434)		8.9%
<i>Out of which called for GSS interrogation (of total applicants)</i>	24 (F:5; M:19)	2.7%	18 (F:7; M:11)	2.7%	344 (F:78; M:266)	4.3%	116 (F:25; M:91)		1.6%

Referrals out of Gaza by geographic location (total numbers and %, by response)									
Period	August 2010		August 2011		January – August 2010		January – August 2011		
Total outside Gaza	1,162		1,034		8,186		8,630		
West Bank	136	11.7%	109	10.5%	1,035	12.6%	864		10.0%
East Jerusalem	312	26.9%	331	32.0%	2,402	29.3%	2,475		28.7%
Egypt	430	37.0%	328	31.7%	2,873	35.0%	3,025		35.0%
Jordan	16	1.4%	25	2.4%	146	1.8%	164		1.9%
Israel	268	23.1%	241	23.3%	1,730	21.3%	2,102		24.4%