

Access of patients from Gaza Strip to treatment abroad for the period from 1 – 31 August 2009

Highlights:

- WHO confirms the death of one year old child while waiting to obtain an appointment at Maqasid Hospital.
- 3 patients (2 F and 1 M), have been denied crossing at Erez, and returned, despite holding a permit.
- Almost 30 % of patients that apply for permit to cross Erez, are delayed by the Israeli Authorities, lose their hospital appointment, and had to restart the whole referral process from the beginning.
- Cardiology, Oncology, Orthopedics and Ophthalmology are still the leading cause for referral outside Gaza and counted for 45 to 50 % of the total referrals.

The Referral Abroad Department (RAD) has approved and issued a total of 1090 referral documents during August 2009, as follows; 21.2 % to Gaza NGOs medical facilities; 11.1 % West Bank; 24.1 % East Jerusalem; 26.9 % Egypt; 2.9 % Jordan; and 13.5 % to Israeli hospitals.

It has been noted that referrals to Israeli hospitals is increasing constantly since May 09, as shown in the table below; and that Cardiology, Oncology, Orthopaedics and Ophthalmology are still the leading cause for referral outside Gaza, counted usually for 45 to 50 % of the total referrals, and cost between 42 to 45 % out of the total cost for treatment abroad.

The following table shows the numbers of referred patients by treating facility in the period from January to August 2009

Treating Location	Number of Referrals per month 2009							
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Gaza (Non MoH)	37	94	141	9	280	483	357	232
WB (MoH & NGOs)	14	84	74	20	110	157	128	121
Jerusalem	36	182	115	66	170	224	206	263
Egypt	102	354	364	143	440	361	286	294
Jordan	14	49	33	18	40	37	34	32
Israel	28	0	2	6	40	94	143	148
Total	231	763	729	262	1080	1356	1154	1,090

The District Liaison Office for Erez Crossing processed 854 applications for permits, entitled to cross Erez during August according to their hospital

appointments, compared to 735 last month, 70 % of them have been approved, 0.9 % denied and 28.5 % delayed. It has been noted that these proportions are similar to last month's.

Three patients (2 females/1 male), have been denied crossing at Erez, despite holding a permit. One female has been asked to change the companion, and the other two males have been denied by the GSS without any clear reason.

The results of patients' applications disaggregated according to age group and gender is shown in the following table

By Age Group in years	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Returned despite approved		Delayed for GSS interview	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
0 – 3	42	39	40	34			2	5				
4 - 15	82	58	75	52			7	6				
16 – 40	200	116	80	68	4	2	115	46	1		48	11
41 – 60	146	76	101	67	1	1	44	8		2	23	
Over 60	52	43	45	39			7	4			2	
Grand Total	522	332	341	260	5	3	175	69	1	2	73	11
	854		601		8		244		3		84	

84 patients (34.4 %) of the delayed patients, have been asked to be interviewed by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS) before giving answer to their request, 36 of them (30 M & 6 F) did not go for the interview, 44 (40 M & 4 F) have been asked to submit new applications, none has been approved after the interview and 4 (3 M & 1 F) have been denied.

The delayed patients missed the date of appointment with the health facilities they have been referred to, and must submit new applications for permit to cross Erez, after obtaining another new hospital appointment.

The following table shows the period in days exceeding the hospitals' appointments, where 67.6 % of them have been delayed for more than one week.

Period for studying the application in days	Male	Female	Total
01 – 07	51	28	79
08 – 14	47	26	73
15 – 30	43	11	54
More than 30 days	34	4	38
Total	175	69	244

However, a number of patients died, either before accessing the medical facility they have been referred to, or due to delay in accessing them, as they have reached them in a critical and poor condition. WHO confirmed the death of one child during the month of August and 22 patients since the beginning of the year: 3 patients died in February, 8 in March, 4 in April, 2 in May, 4 in June; none in July and one in August, 2009.

Mennatallah Alaa Al Bilbaisy is 1.2 year old female child, was treated for a cardiac disease called Patent Ductus Arteriosis (a hole between the two ventricles of the heart) at Dorrah Hospital-Gaza. Although the father was trying for more than 6 months to convince the treating doctor of the need to treat Mennah abroad, the doctor was not convinced. After being in and out of Dorrah hospital many times, the father decided to treat Mennah at the Paediatric Specialist Hospital-Gaza, where Mennah had to be admitted in ICU. The father started the process of referring her abroad as the doctor decided that she needs cardiac surgery. The father obtained an approved referral to Maqasid Hospital on 9 July 09, and have been asked to wait for appointment because of the long waiting list at Maqasid. Unfortunately, Mennah died on 7 August 09 at 3:30 Am, after waiting the hospital appointment for a month in ICU. The father of Mennah said if there were other choices for treatment places or if the borders were open, the situation would have been totally different, and Mennah would have been among us now.

According to the Liaison Officer at Erez, the actual number of patients who crossed Erez during August was 569 including 32 back to back ambulances; compared to 509 including 34 via back to back ambulances last July.

Rafah border has been opened for patients in the period from 3 to 7 August, where an estimate number of 500 patients have crossed to Egypt. The border was opened in other sporadic days for pilgrimages and political missions only.