



AFEDJ

American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

Bearing Witness

A Journey with Holy Land Christians

EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF JERUSALEM MINISTRIES

Hospitals

EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF JERUSALEM MINISTRIES:

HOSPITALS

“It is our belief the inability of any member of our community to afford healthcare should not and will not be an obstacle to receiving high quality care. For many patients, St. Luke’s is their last, if not only, hope.” – Dr. Walid Kerry, Former Director of St. Luke’s Hospital in Nablus, West Bank

Just as Jesus drew crowds who were attracted to the incarnation of love, acceptance, and dignity he demonstrated, people in need are drawn to the care provided at Diocese of Jerusalem hospitals. Christians engaged in diocesan healing ministries follow Jesus’ example by providing medical care to all people with compassion regardless of religion, ethnicity, or ability to pay for services. The two Diocese of Jerusalem hospitals - St. Luke’s Hospital in Nablus and Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City - are two of a handful of Christian hospitals in the West Bank and Gaza. The small Christian communities in Nablus and Gaza shoulder a disproportionate share of humanitarian medical care. The hospitals serve, almost exclusively, indigent Palestinian families, who seek out these hospitals for the expert care they receive and because they are treated with dignity and respect..

When we speak about healthcare for Palestinians, we need to understand that the Palestinian people are divided and isolated in their own homeland. Palestinian territory is divided into unconnected regions – the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza – and further divided within these regions by separation walls, checkpoints, blockades, refugee camps and Israeli settlements, which all prevent freedom of movement and connection among Palestinians. At present there are more than 600 blockades and obstacles to movement across the West Bank.

These barriers and divisions inhibit the right of Palestinians to healthcare by restricting the movement of patients, doctors, ambulances and medications within the area.



Following the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords, the Palestinian Authority and its Ministry of Health, was given responsibility for the administration of health care in the Palestinian Territories. Yet, the PA does not have full control over the health care system. Israel retains ultimate control over healthcare budgets, border crossings, building permits and pharmaceutical imports and exports. Consequently, Ministry of Health hospitals are pretty basic, certainly in comparison to hospitals in Israel. And they lack many resources we take for granted - especially those relating to imaging and specialists. Doctors in the West Bank and Gaza have limited opportunities for training and professional development. The result is that Palestine has 8 times fewer specialist doctors when compared with Israel.

Both Diocese of Jerusalem hospitals - St. Luke's Hospital in Nablus and Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza – are charity hospitals. They serve particularly vulnerable populations – adults and children living in poverty who have low levels of education, poor nutrition and generally unhealthy lifestyles. They have higher than average rates of unemployment. All of these are direct risk factors for chronic illnesses. These conditions are driving a dramatic increase of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and cancer. These are replacing communicable diseases as the main causes of morbidity.

When you visit a Palestinian Ministry of Health hospital or clinic you often hear the word “Inshallah,” the Arabic phrase for “God willing”. Patients are placing their health in God’s hands. Part of the reason for this fatalism is that so many Palestinians lack access to quality healthcare and health insurance. They often visit clinics for serious ailments only to learn that the required tests and procedures are either unavailable or out of reach because of cost. Sadly, many are seen in clinics for the first time when they are already in the late stages of their illness.

It’s important to note that access to quality healthcare varies depending on where a Palestinian lives in the Occupied Territories. For instance, a child with cancer who lives in East Jerusalem might have access to Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives and receive comprehensive treatment. For a child in Gaza the same diagnosis could well be a death sentence.



Ahli Arab Hospital

Mission: In Arabic, its name means “The Arab People’s Hospital.”

Services offered include (1) free community clinic with transportation from outlying neighborhoods; (2) clinic for underweight and malnourished children; (3) physical and occupational therapy; (4) treatment for burn patients, primarily children; (5) psycho-social support for children and their caregivers who have suffered trauma from war and the deprivations of the blockade (5) surgery and in-patient care; and (6) emergency services.

Location: Gaza City, Gaza

Founded: The oldest hospital in Gaza, it was founded in 1882.

Serves: More than 45,000 Gazans receive care at the Ahli Hospital each year

The Reality:

Due to the deteriorating economic situation in Gaza and the Israeli blockade, the numbers of indigent Gazans, who have no ability to pay for medical services and little access to care, continues to grow. The waiting lists for surgeries of all kinds are growing. A February 2019 report by the Israeli military states, “Hospitals in Gaza have reduced expenses by closing departments, with most of their efforts focused on providing initial treatment in emergency rooms and trauma wards. There is almost no way that patients with cancer, diabetes or dialysis needs can be treated; they are simply being sent home.” The military cited deteriorating healthcare as a major contributor to unrest in Gaza and thus a threat to Israel. Unfortunately, the government of Israel has done little to help.

The health system in Gaza continues to deteriorate with shortages of drugs, medical disposables and laboratory materials. Fuel to power generators has become a major expense in every hospital’s budget. There’s a growing need for referral of patients outside of Gaza, yet the approval rate for referrals – controlled by Israel - has declined dramatically.

Travel restrictions and a crippling blockade are a daily reality for Palestinian refugees in Gaza. Overcoming obstacles on many fronts is a daily routine for the leaders of Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City, but recent years have offered up some particularly daunting challenges: Clashes at the border and deep unrest, and the effects of U.S. cuts in aid to the UN agency that serves Palestinian refugees. Residents experience appalling living conditions, including widespread water contamination, food insecurity, psycho-social trauma from political turmoil and conflict, limited medicine and medical supplies, the lack of fuel for heating and cooking, among others. With arrival of the pandemic, the hospital leaders have worked hard to prepare and treat patients in an isolation unit while continuing to provide regular health care for their patients. With a lack of dependable electricity, Ahli Arab Hospital spends an average of \$1,800 a day on diesel fuel to run its generators up to 20 hours.

Responding to the Reality:

Ahli Arab Hospital is the oldest and the only Christian hospital in Gaza. It is the only hospital in Gaza not operated by a political faction and the only hospital in Gaza without armed guards at its gate. It is an oasis of healing and hope in the midst of the chaos and desperation of Gaza City. This Christian hospital serves the poorest of the poor - families in isolated neighborhoods and refugee camps. Ahli sends buses into these neighborhoods to bring people to the hospital for the free community clinic it operates 2 days a week. Suhaila Tarazi, Ahli’s director, calls the clinic the “heartbeat of Ahli Hospital.” And it’s entirely funded by U.S. donors contributing through AFEDJ.

Ahli receives no financial support from the government – either Hamas or the Palestinian Authority. Ahli serves everyone. No one is turned away. And people seek out Ahli because they know they’ll receive excellent care and be treated with dignity and respect. It is a safe haven of peace and compassion in the midst of chaos. Its leaders and medical staff work with dedication to help their patients cope with the health and psycho-social issues they experience, largely due to their living conditions.

St. Luke's Hospital

Mission: The only charitable hospital in Nablus offers a full range of medical services and includes well-regarded neurosurgery, obstetrics, and neonatal departments. Other services offered are: (1) gynecological care; (2) emergency care; (3) general surgery; (4) an on-site community clinic (5) comprehensive lab services.

Location: Nablus, West Bank

Founded: 1900

Serves: 75,000 patients, including surgery, outpatients and lab tests

The Reality:

The 350,000 citizens of Nablus and the surrounding areas, including several Palestinian refugee camps, struggle to access quality health care and medical services. Palestinians do not have freedom of movement and the medical system in the Palestinian Territories suffers from regular shortages of medications and medical equipment. Hospitals lack sophisticated diagnostic and treatment equipment. Contributing to these challenges is the wide disparity in spending on medical care in the Palestinian Territories (\$248 per capita) and neighboring countries, such as Israel (\$2,046 per capita). 40% of St. Luke's Hospital patients are uninsured.



Responding to the Reality:

St. Luke's Hospital was founded in 1900 in Nablus, a city in the northern part of the West Bank. Nablus once was an important engine of the Palestinian economy but is now still recovering from the devastating second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, against Israel, which left Nablus economically isolated for a decade.

St. Luke's Hospital's primary objective is to provide the highest possible level of medical care to all patients, with dignity and respect. The hospital turns away no one, regardless of their ability to pay for services. St. Luke's operates under the belief that all people have a right to essential health care. The hospital obligates itself to the World Health Organization's core principals of human rights to provide fully accessible medical care to all that is: safe, effective, people-centered, timely, equitable, efficient and integrated – providing care that makes available the full range of health services throughout a patient's life. For more than 120 years the services offered by this hospital have provided a lifeline for the 15,000 patients seen at its outpatient clinic each year. On average, 300 babies are delivered at St. Luke's each month. St. Luke's welcomes all patients without regard to their religion, ethnicity, or ability to pay. Everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

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