

Welcome to the Sixty ninth issue of the Health Inforum Newsletter.

QUOTE  
OF THE  
MONTH

Nature, time and patience are three great physicians. ~ H.G. Bohn ~

HEALTH NEWS

**World Health Day 2006: Working together for health**

In 2006, World Health Day (celebrated annually on 7 April), will be devoted to the health workforce crisis. On this day around the globe, hundreds of organizations will host events to draw attention to the global health workforce crisis and celebrate the dignity and value of working for health. WHO invites all organizations to celebrate World Health Day 2006.

There is a chronic global shortage of health workers, as a result of decades of underinvestment in their education, training, salaries, working environment and management. This has led to a severe lack of key skills, rising levels of career switching and early retirement, as well as national and international migration. For more information:

[http://www.who.int/world-health-ay/2006/tm\\_speech/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/world-health-ay/2006/tm_speech/en/index.html) .

**OCHA: Basic food commodities are no longer available in the Gaza Strip**

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the occupied Palestinian territory (OCHA) published its monthly access report including an update on Karni cargo border crossing closure and growing food shortages in Gaza.

According to the report, the basic food commodities are no longer available in the Gaza Strip. Wheat flour, the main ingredient for the Palestinian staple of bread, will run out on soon. The largest flour mill in Gaza (Matahin) has received only three truckloads of wheat grain since 5 January. Its operations shut down since 4 March, when its last 6,000 metric tones wheat flour was released to local bakeries. The other five large flour mills are closed since 23 February, 2006.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the World Food Programme (WFP) (providing food assistance to 51% and 12% of the Gazan population respectively) rely on the Gaza mills as a main source for wheat flour for their distributions to their targets. The wheat flour warehouses for both agencies are practically empty. For more information [http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/opt/docs/UN/OCHA/ochaSR\\_GazaAccess\\_Feb06.pdf](http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/opt/docs/UN/OCHA/ochaSR_GazaAccess_Feb06.pdf)

**European Commission Announced \$ 76 Million for UNRWA**

On 28 February, the European Commission announced a donation of \$ 76 million to the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) for its annual budget. The funds will support UNRWA's general programming in the areas of education, health, relief and social services in the Agency's five fields of operation: the Gaza Strip and West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

**The Palestinian Ministry of Health lacks fund for 2006**

on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2006, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) appealed to all friends and supporters worldwide to help in addressing the significant shortfalls of medicines & drugs, supplies and disposables, laboratory, X ray and diagnostic materials, direct patient treatment and medical services. The monthly budget needed for the mentioned items is US\$ 4.5 millions.

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Casualties & access incidents

During February, there were 21 episodes of ambulance delay with a total of 25 hours, and 3 cases of denied access.

**Why is this shortage?**

The Palestinian MoH is completely lacking funds for 2006 for non salary items. A selection of essential drugs worth about US \$1 million is already out of stock, though urgently needed. This shortage of fund came as a consequence of the end of the ESSP project by end of 2004 which was co-funded by the World Bank, EU and other donors that had covered most part of MoH non salary budget since 2001. Furthermore, during 2005 the MoH has accumulated a deficit of about 48 million US \$.

**Aspects of the MoH Needs:**

**a. Running costs for Non salary items in 2005**

Item	Budget in US\$
Medicines (drugs)	31,111,111
Vaccines	2,888,889
Medical supplies and Disposables	7,777,778
Laboratory materials & blood bank disposables	3,911,111
Medical Gazes	466,667
Office supplies	817,778
Cleaning Materials	266667
Fuel	1,393,111
Textile and clothes	444,444
Spare parts and replacement of damaged equipment	888,889
Emergency room furniture equipment	5,222,222
<b>Total</b>	<b>55,188,667</b>

Source: Department of Finance, MoH

**b. Urgently needed:** drugs, disposables, vaccines and blood bank materials (about US \$1 million)

- Drugs: US \$ 300,000 for 3 months. The drugs are mainly for the secondary and tertiary care with few items covering maternal and child health conditions and emergencies
- Labs reagent and disposables: US \$103,000 for 3 months. The lab reagents are mainly for specialized laboratories although some items concern also the primary and secondary care
- Vaccines: US \$ 535,000 for the year 2006. The vaccines are for adults and non-EPI vaccines and the largest share is the meningitis vaccine for the pilgrimage (US \$) 350,000)

**c. MoH arrears:** In 2005, the MoH accumulated a deficit of about US\$ 48 millions, mainly includes:

- Tertiary health care (mainly referral abroad): about US\$ 31 millions;
- Drugs: around US\$ 8 millions;
- Incremental costs (mainly maintenance and operational costs) : US \$ 2.1 millions; and
- Cleaning contracts for hospital and primary health care facilities: around US \$ 3 millions.

**REPORT**

**Referral abroad of patients from Gaza Strip  
February 2006.**

**WHO/Health Inforum report**

Access to specialized health services outside Gaza Strip continued to be monitored by HealthInforum, during February 2006<sup>1</sup>.

**1. Access through Erez**

During the period 1 – 28 February, referral abroad for in-patient and out-patient care was requested for 769 patients. Out of the total requests, 716 (93%) received the permit and could leave trough Erez. Each patient

has been accompanied by one person, mainly a family member.

In February, the daily number of ambulance transits ranged from 3 to 9 per day. The Israelis are using a checking device at the crossing since the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, for all pedestrian crossing, including the patients. Complicated searching procedures and long waiting time continued to be reported, causing disturbance to the patients.

Figure 1: Access of patients through Erez during 1-28 February, 2006

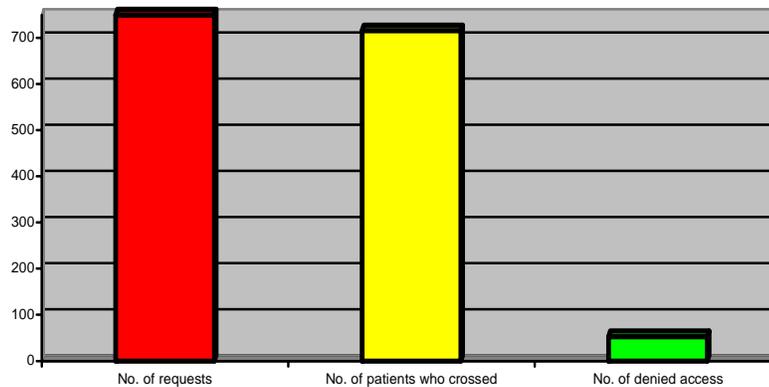


Figure 2: Monthly percentage of patients who crossed Erez (out of the total requests) during the period 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2005 – 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2006

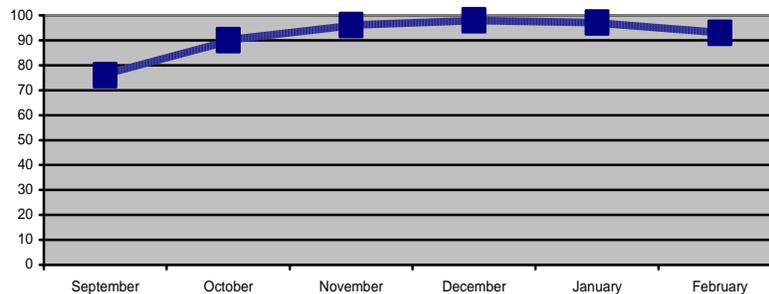
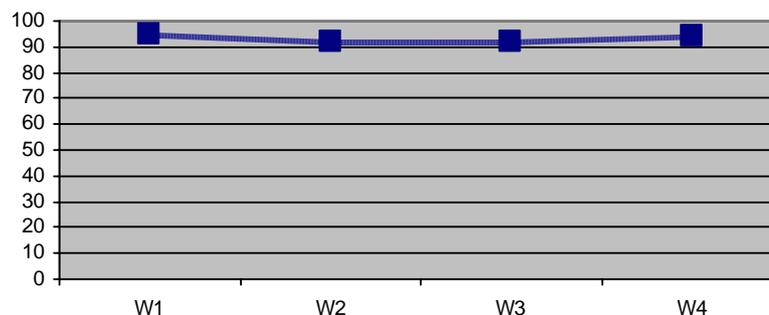


Figure 3: Weekly percentage of patients who crossed Erez (out of the total requests) during the period 1<sup>st</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2006



<sup>1</sup> Access to specialized health services outside Gaza Strip has continued to be monitored by Health Inforum, during February 2006. The source of reported data is the Health DCO Coordinator of the Ministry of Health and the Director General of Rafah border crossing.

## 2. Access through Rafah

From the first of February until 28 February, the number of working hours was 9 hours per day (8am-5pm).

The treatment abroad department in the Ministry of Health issued 991 referral documents (out of which, 882(89%) are referred for in-patient health services) to Egypt and Jordan. In both cases the patients have to go through Rafah border crossing. The referral document is valid for one month.

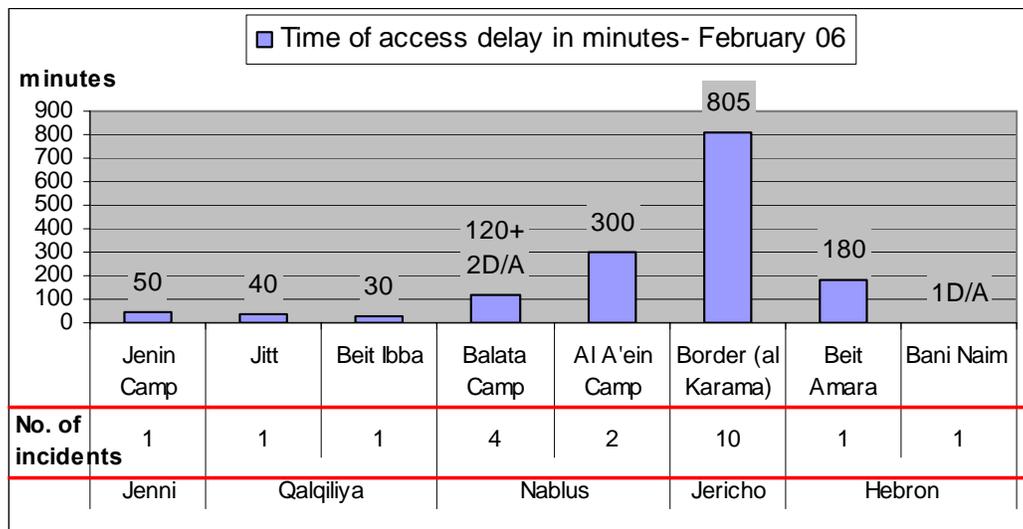
The number of patients with a MoH request for referral abroad who crossed Rafah border was 197<sup>1</sup>, according to the mentioned sources. The low rate in crossing, compared to the released requests, seems not to be explained by a selection done at the border, nor by other evident reasons. Further investigation is underway, in order to explain such a low crossing rate.

28 urgent patients in need of ambulance transportation left Rafah border and the back to back transferal procedure (Palestinian-Egyptian ambulance) took 1-2 hours. 38 patients arrived from Egypt and the transferal procedure took 5-10 minutes. Before the disengagement period, the waiting time for back to back ambulance transportation across the border was 2-8 hours, for both arrivals and departures.

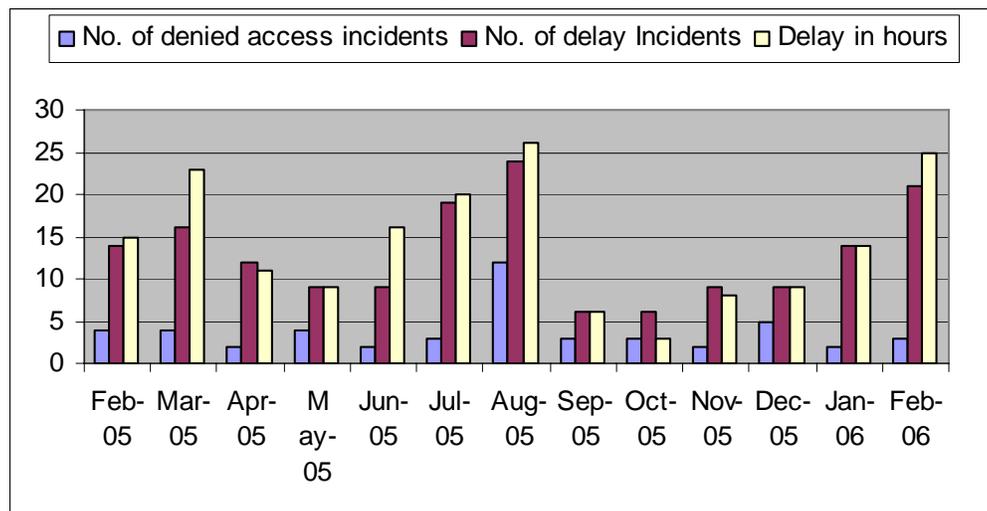
<sup>1</sup> Only cases holding the documents released by the Palestinian Ministry of Health, referral abroad department, have been recorded as patient crossing, whilst patients who do not hold the referral documents have been recorded as normal passengers.

## CASUALTIES & HEALTH INCIDENTS

During February 2006, there were 21 episodes of ambulance delay (for a total delay of 25 hrs). In 3 cases the access was totally denied, according to PRCS. The following diagram shows the total number of ambulance incidents by area, the time of delay and the episodes of denied access (D/A) at the checkpoints:



This diagram shows the variation from February 2005 – February 2006:



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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Health Inforum posts daily news and announcements concerning health issues on its website: [www.healthinforum.org](http://www.healthinforum.org)

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