



Ambulances at Rafah crossing ©WHO

Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: RAD 8 (Sept 25, 2013)

Summary

- **Outside referrals:** Total referrals remained high in August. The continued deep reduction in referrals to Egypt to one-third of normal numbers and halt in referrals to Jordan were countered by year-high referrals to East Jerusalem hospitals and to Israeli hospitals.
- **Access:** 3 patients (a 7-year-old girl and 2 men, aged 18-40) were denied permits. 91.11% of patient applications for permits were approved and 8.6%, (88 patients--29 females and 59 males) received no response to their applications, including 13 children, which delayed medical treatment.
- **Patients interrogated:** 14 patients (11 males; 3 females) who had applied for permits to cross Erez checkpoint were requested to appear for Israeli security interviews. Only one patient was granted a permit after interrogation.
- **Medical reasons for referrals:** Most August 2013 referrals were for treatment in oncology--214 patients (15.45%), nuclear medicine--109 (7.87%), orthopaedics--105 (7.58%), ophthalmology--101 (7.29%), urology--88 (6.35%), paediatrics--83 (5.99%), heart catheterization--82 (5.92%), neurosurgery--76 (5.49%), haematology--71 (5.13%), MRI--53 (3.83%) and heart surgery--44 (3.18%).

Referrals reflect needs and local capacity

The Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza referred 1,385 patients to outside hospitals in August, slightly higher than the monthly average in 2013. 36.75% of referrals were to hospitals in East Jerusalem (509), followed by 27.6% to Israel (382). Referrals to both increased by 25% since June, while referrals to Egypt decreased significantly, down from 300 to 113 patients reflecting the unstable border and internal situation in Egypt. For the second consecutive month, Egypt dropped to fifth-place as a referral destination, from third-place (**Table 1**).

Referrals for oncology, hematology, ophthalmology, orthopedic surgery, heart surgery and heart catheterization in particular reflect the lack of capacity within the MoH due to shortages of drugs and disposable materials in these areas. Referrals within Gaza to non-MoH facilities were for heart catheterization (67), lithotripsy (63), MRI (45), rehabilitation (17), intensive care (6) and other specialties (7).

Limited access to Egypt

Private patients also delayed trips to Cairo for medical treatment due to the unstable situation and restrictions on access to Egypt. According to Rafah terminal data for January-June 2013, a monthly average of 20,577 passengers travelled through the terminal to Egypt, including 4,177 (20.3%) seeking health care abroad. However in July, the terminal registered 8,091 passengers, including 411 (5%) seeking health care. In August 5,869 passengers were registered, including only 259 (4%) for health care, a fraction of the usual number.

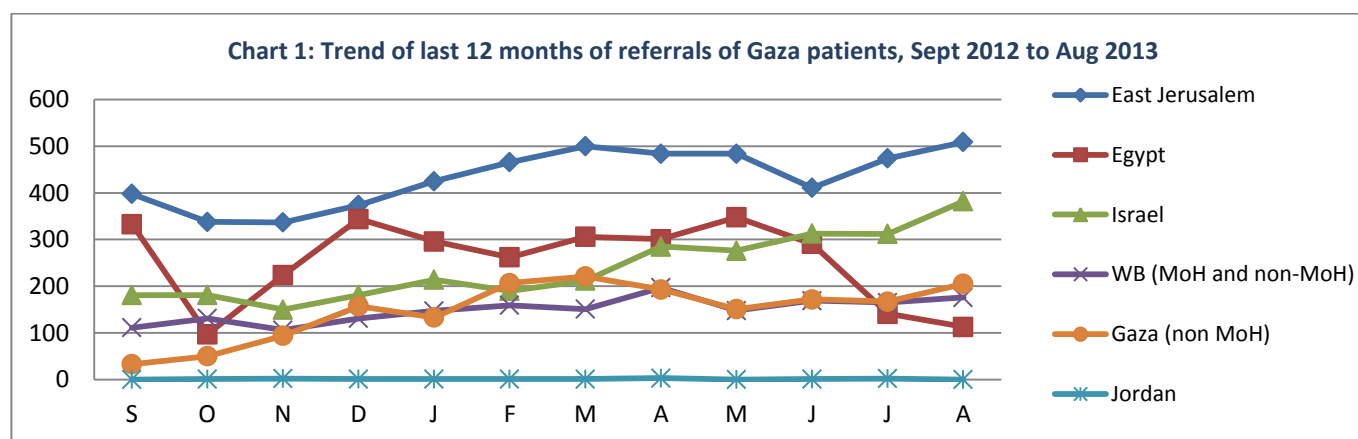
Rafah terminal was completely closed for 15 days in August (7 days for security reasons, and 8 days for holidays/weekends). Rafah terminal authorities reported that after July 10, hours were restricted to only 10 am-2 pm. According to the Palestinian authorities of the terminal, there were neither medical delegations nor humanitarian aid entered Gaza from Egypt during August.

No referrals were made to Jordan in August (**Chart 1**). There was a significant gender gap in referrals in August: 58% male patients versus 42% female patients. 27% of all referrals were children aged 0-17 years and 17% were elderly over 60 years.

Table 1: Palestinian MoH Referrals, by destination, January-August 2013

Referral Destination	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Total
Gaza (non-MoH facilities)	133	207	221	193	151	172	167	205	1,449
WB (MoH and non-MoH)	147	159	151	197	148	169	165	176	1,312
East Jerusalem	425	466	500	484	484	411	474	509	3,753
Jordan	1	1	1	3	0	1	2	0	9
Israel	214	190	212	285	276	313	312	382	2,184
Egypt	296	262	306	301	348	291	141	113	2,058
Total	1,216	1,285	1,391	1,463	1,407	1,357	1,261	1,385	10,765

Source: MoH- Referral Abroad Department, Gaza.



Access through Erez

In August 2013, 932 of 1,023 patients (91.11%) received permits to cross Erez to access hospitals in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, or in Israel or Jordan (**Table 2**). 3 (a 7-year-old girl with a kidney condition and 2 men aged 18-40 with orthopedic problems) were denied access to specialized hospitals.

Table 2: Israeli District Liaison Office decisions on patient permit applications to cross Erez, by age, sex and GSS risk, August 2013

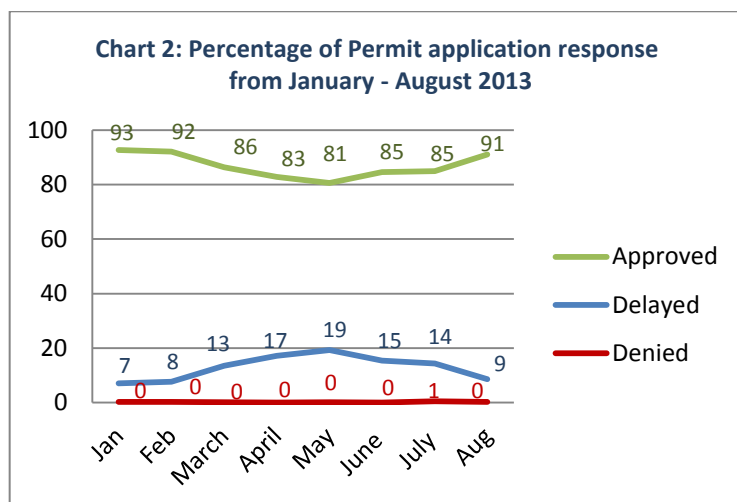
Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Called for GSS interrogation	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	45	65	42	65	0	0	3	0	0	0
4 - 17	95	132	90	126	1	0	4	6	1	0
18 - 40	136	148	121	103	0	2	15	43	2	9
41 - 60	109	127	105	119	0	0	4	8	0	2
Over 60	75	91	72	89	0	0	3	2	0	0
Sub-total	460	563	430	502	1	2	29	59	3	11
Total	1023		932 (91.11%)		3 (0.29%)		88 (8.6%)		14 (1.37%)	

Source: District coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

According to the Palestinian District Coordination office, 88 applications of patients (8.6%), including 13 children and 5 patients over the age of 60, received no response; 33% were females. Out of the 88 delayed applications, 43% had been destined for scheduled appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 39% in hospitals in the West Bank, and 17% in Israel.

Responses from Israeli authorities should be given to applicants within 10 days. 31 applications were pending between 1-2 weeks, and 13 for 2-4 weeks. Out of the total 88 delayed patients, 12 patients received approval in the first 2 weeks of September after reapplying with new appointments.

13 patients, including 2 females, and one companion (the father of a child), were called for security interviews by Israeli General Security Services (GSS) as a condition to process permit applications. Only one patient granted a permit after interrogation.



The permit approval rate has been rising since May, but is still below the level of January 2013, due to a number of factors, including staff changes in February 2013 in the Palestinian District Coordination office, the increase in volume of applications and the nature and length of the security review. The rate of denials, while small, is higher than recent months (**Chart 2**).

The volume of applications increased in 2013 by 34%, compared to the same period in 2012, while the approval rate declined by 7.26 %, and the rate of delay was 2.5 times higher (**Table 3**).

Table 3: Israeli District Liaison Office decisions on permit requests to cross Erez, by response, sex of applicant (number and %); a comparison of the current year with the previous one.

Period	August 2012		August 2013		January – August 2012		January – August 2013	
Total	585 (F:282; M:303)		1,023 (F:460; M:563)		6,216 (F:2,935; M:3,281)		8,344 (F:3,920; M:4,424)	
Approved	543 (F:269; M:274)	92.8%	932 (F:430; M:502)	91.1%	5,827 (F:2,787; M:3,040)	93.74%	7,216 (F:3,496; M:3,720)	86.48%
Denied	7 (F:1; M:6)	1.2%	3 (F: 1; M:2)	0.3%	53 (F:9; M:44)	0.85%	16 (F:3; M:13)	0.19%
Delayed	35 (F:12; M:23)	6%	88 (F:29; M:59)	8.6%	336 (F:139; M:197)	5.41%	1,112 (F:421; M:691)	13.33%
-- of which called for GSS interrogation (of total applicants)	10 (F:2;M :8)	1.71%	14 (F:3; M:11)	1.37%	132 (F:51; M:81)	2.1%	121 (F24; M:97)	1.45%

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

In August, 90.8% of referral patients applying for Israeli permits were financially covered by the Palestinian MoH, 5.8% were self-funded, and the remaining patients were funded by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, Peres Center for Peace, Nour Ala-Al-Alam foundation, and UNRWA. MoH referrals do not cover transportation or companion costs and some items of patient care, for example, medicines not in hospital supply.

The Palestinian General Authority for Civil Affairs registered 833 patients and 816 companions travelling through Erez checkpoint to Israel, oPt or Jordan during August. The Emergency Medical Services of the MoH in Gaza coordinated the travel of 372 people to Egypt. 315 patients traveled through Rafah border, most with companions: 56 patients were transferred by ambulances, and 259 patients traveled through Rafah terminal as regular passengers.

Patient access at Gaza exit points

Table 4: Gaza Health Access Crossings, August 2013

Point of exit	Patients Crossing	Crossing by ambulance (back-to-back transfers)	Days open in month
Erez crossing (north-Israel)*	833 patients/816 companions	56 patients	Open 26 days ; Closed 5 days (5 Saturdays)
Rafah crossing (south-Egypt)**	259 patients	56 patients/57 companions	Open 16 days but hours restricted after July 10 to 10 am-2 pm ; closed 15 days (5 Fridays, 3 days for Eid Al-Fitr holiday, 7 days for security reasons)

*Source: Palestinian General Authority for Civil Affairs

**Source: Emergency Medical Services of the MoH, Gaza