



רופאים לזכויות אדם
PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
أطباء لحقوق الإنسان

November 29, 2017

To: Major General Yoav Mordechai
Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT)
Through: COGAT, Public Inquiries, cogat.pnz@gmail.com;
Gaza District Coordination & Liaison (DCL), Public Inquiries,
kapatz@cogatmtkgaza.gov.il
Moshe Bar Siman Tov
Director General, Ministry of Health, mmancal@moh.gov.il

Re: Rapid response to applications by women cancer patients from Gaza

Since early 2017, we have been encountering new difficulties and obstacles placed on women cancer patients from the Gaza Strip in need of medical care. As a result of these difficulties and obstacles, growing numbers of cancer patients seek to exit Gaza for treatment, and growing numbers fail to do so.

As you know full well, Gaza is blockaded by Israel, which prevents free movement between it and the West Bank, as well as by Egypt, which keeps the Rafah Crossing closed for most of the year. This blockade affects the Palestinian health system's ability to provide adequate medical care to patients, including women cancer patients. The treatment available in Gaza, which includes only some chemotherapy treatments and only some of the auxiliary drugs, is inadequate and does not provide an appropriate medical solution. The past few months have seen a drop in the supply of drugs adjuvant to chemotherapies, and it has become difficult to perform tumor removal operations due to the persistent shortage in fuel and electricity. Finally, the health system in Gaza has never been able to provide cancer radiation therapy or radioactive iodine therapy, and has never had the instruments necessary to diagnose the progression of the disease, such as a PET-CT scanner.

Consequently, more women patients are being referred by their physicians to treatment outside Gaza. Despite this growing demand, in recent months we have also witnessed a growing difficulty in obtaining exit permits for such patients through the Gaza DCL. Whereas in the past, cancer and other patients with critical illness would have obtained exit permits given their health condition, today it seems medical urgency is insufficient to obtain a permit. In addition, the Palestinian Ministry of Health has also imposed restrictions by reducing its support of medical referrals to treatment outside Gaza due to budget restraints.

Due to these developments, Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHRI) have been contacted by multiple patients, and in recent months we have been receiving a growing number of requests by women cancer specifically, whose application for a permit is being withheld "under review".

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Recently, the COGAT has issued a new procedure that regulates the duration of processing applications for an exit permit from Gaza, and limited it to 23 workdays in medical cases. In practice, however, the waiting times far exceed your own procedural limit. PHRI is currently handling eight women cancer patients' applications delayed for many months pending such "review". Two of those patients have been waiting for as long as six months and two have been waiting for three months. Note that not only cancer patients are subject to a prolonged review process. It is through this group of patients that we highlight this trend of extending the delays in responding to applications by patients from Gaza who apply for an exit permit for medical reasons.

Delaying the response not only prolongs the patients' suffering, but requires them to consume their limited strength in fighting the bureaucracy instead of fighting the illness. Moreover, the denial of timely response prevents the patients from exercising their rights by appealing a refusal should their application be denied. Delaying the response for many months attests, in fact, to a policy of disparaging the suffering of those patients and shirking Israel's responsibility for the consequences of the restrictions it deliberately imposes. Needless to say, the time factor in treating cancer is critical for the success of treatment, and every delay has serious consequences.

Suffering from various types of cancer, these women depend on the permits issued by the State of Israel for receiving the medical care they need. PHRI knows of cases of cancer patients who have died while waiting for an exit permit. It is difficult to establish a direct causal relation between their death and the fact that they had been denied the exit permit, since the illness may have taken their lives even had they received the treatment. It may be established beyond doubt, however, that in preventing their exit from Gaza, or in delaying it, Israel denies those patients any chance of recovering and moving on with their lives. Accordingly, we call upon

- The COGAT to review the applications of all women cancer patients right away and complete this process in a timely manner in order to enable their immediate exit for lifesaving treatment; and
- The Ministry of Health to take responsibility for the health of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip that is directly affected by the conduct of Israeli security agencies, and make sure that permit applications by women cancer patients are reviewed without delay.

Please find attached the details of nine women cancer patients who are still waiting for the approval of their application for an exit permit. Eight of them have been told that their application is "under review".

Sincerely,

Ghada Majadle & Mor Efrat

Department of Occupied Territories, PHRI

CC:

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