

Critical lifesaving treatments to continue in East Jerusalem Hospitals

For several years, Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) and other East Jerusalem hospitals have been facing cash-flow problems because of the inability of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to pay on a regular basis the bills of the patients which it refers to these hospitals. While from 2017 onwards the PA introduced regular monthly payments, there is still a considerable debt from the patient referrals. This is influencing severely the cash flow and operating ability of the six East Jerusalem hospitals (Makassed Islamic Charitable Hospital, Red Crescent Maternity Hospital, St. John Eye Hospital, The Jerusalem Princess Basma Center, St. Joseph's Hospital and Augusta Victoria Hospital). These hospitals offer lifesaving treatments to patients from the West Bank and Gaza.

Currently, the total debt for the six hospitals amounts to USD 80 million and for AVH alone it is USD 38 million. As the Palestinian Authority has been unable to pay its full patient referrals, other actors, like the United States and the European Union, have contributed financially to the PA to help them pay the bills and avoid a mounting financial crisis, even collapse, of the East Jerusalem hospitals. The US Congress approved USD 25 million for the financial year 2017 to be paid to the PA to cover the bills of the patients from the West Bank. In early September, President Trump's administration, according to news reports, announced that it will cut the funding for the six East Jerusalem hospitals. This decision came after a policy review which led also to several other cuts effecting the West Bank and Gaza.

While there is an immediate impact to the cash flow of the Augusta Victoria Hospital, whose share of the US funding normally is around USD 11 million, there are also other impacts. In the last decade alone, the United States' contribution, through the USAID, to the technological advancement and medical expertise of AVH has amounted to USD 10 million of funding additional to the yearly contribution helping to cover the PA referrals. AVH has been building its capacity significantly with the support of the United States. There is a concern that besides the cash flow and operating difficulties, the medical advancement may reach a standstill if the American funding gap is not covered.

Various actors, including the Palestinian Authority, Israel, the United States and the rest of the international community, have an interest in seeing continued services within the six East Jerusalem hospitals. Therefore, they need to work hard to find a short-term solution to the crisis by finding a way to replace the gap created by the US Administration's decision. Doing this is urgent, but not enough. A long-term solution for the sustainability of these services must be found. Some of the key components of the long-term sustainable solution include elimination of the PA debts to the hospitals, reform of the Palestinian health system, and adequate funding locally and from donors for Palestinians to access their full health rights.

The Lutheran World Federation calls on

- The Palestinian National Authority to address urgently, with the international community, the short-term funding crisis to cover the lifesaving treatment of patients from the West Bank and Gaza;
- The Palestinian National Authority and the international community to find a long-term solution to the situation of the East Jerusalem hospitals; and
- The US Administration and US Congress to work through a solution which secures American financial support to the people of the West Bank and Gaza, including budget funding to the East Jerusalem hospitals for the coming years.

Augusta Victoria Hospital is a center of medical excellence in East Jerusalem and a program of the Lutheran World Federation, serving all 5 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. It offers specialized care not available in other hospitals in the West Bank and Gaza, including radiation therapy for cancer patients and pediatric hemodialysis. Augusta Victoria Hospital is accredited by the Joint Commission International for its outstanding quality and fully certified by the Israeli Ministry of Health. AVH receives patients referred by the Palestinian Ministry of Health: 30% of them come from Gaza.