

SCOTTISH PALESTINIAN HEALTH FACULTY



NEWSLETTER NO 5

Welcome to the fifth newsletter of the Scottish Palestinian Health Faculty, continuing to share experience and views between Scottish and Palestinian health professionals.

It is a pleasure to report on page 4 details of the long-delayed but now imminent event to celebrate the life, work and continuing inspiration of Runa Mackay, including details of how to register.



The above instruction, from part of an installation by Ian Hamilton Finlay at Jupiter Artland, the wonderful outdoor sculpture park just outside Edinburgh, provides a theme for this issue. What use is a network if you don't make use of its connections?

The newsletter includes accounts of three visits by Palestinians to Scotland. On page 7 Gerry O'Hare reports on a visit to the Scottish Parliament and West of Scotland action groups by Rasha Al Moghany, MAP Programme Officer in Gaza.

On page 11, Hamish McLeod and Caesar Hakim report on a visit to Glasgow, including the Lord Provost's Office, by clinical psychology colleagues from the Guidance and Training Centre for the Child and Family (GTC) in Bethlehem.

On page 12, there is a description of the process of arranging a clinical observership in Glasgow hospitals and an Edinburgh general practice for a recent medical graduate from Al Quds University in East Jerusalem.

Two reports concern visits by Scottish doctors to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. On page 14 Jane Macaskill, breast cancer surgeon in Dundee, describes her experience on a MAP mission to the West Bank.

On page 16, Edinburgh GP and author Gavin Francis describes his visit to the West Bank, including his friend the Palestinian author Raja Shehadeh.

Then there are two different types of journey including the career change of Dr Khamis Elessi (Page 19) in Gaza, including a month's visit to learn about palliative care medicine in Jordan (Page 21), which several SPHF colleagues were pleased to support financially.

On page 25 Dr Ihab Saleh, who has contributed to the newsletter several times, describes his own career decision, returning to Gaza. The pictures of his wedding are a sight to behold and guaranteed to raise a smile.



Finally on page 27, Melanie Coyne, MAP's Senior Programme Manager reports on MAP's recent activity.

Previous newsletters (1-4) can be accessed on the Scottish Palestinian Forum website at <http://www.scottishpalestinianforum.org.uk/scottish-palestinian-health-faculty-newsletters>

Graham Watt

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Bagpipes at a Palestinian wedding

THE RUNA MACKAY LECTURE 2022

Following informal discussions between Runa Mackay's former colleagues, including Liz Grant, Lesley Morrison and Graham Watt, MAP UK and the Global Health Academy at Edinburgh University have agreed to host the first Runa Mackay Lecture. It is hoped to establish the lecture on an annual basis with the following aims:-

- continuing to honour and celebrate Runa Mackay's life and work, her personal journey with the Palestinians and her commitment to peace and justice
- showcasing and sharing current examples of Scottish health professionals working for Palestine
- highlighting the Palestinian narrative within Scottish society and culture
- connecting people in Scotland who are interested in the Palestine issue
- linking Runa, as an alumni of Edinburgh University, with the power and reach of the University family to make the world a better place and contribute to the 2030 agenda

The first Runa Mackay Lecture, "*A Personal Journey with the Palestinians*", will be given by Dr Philippa Whitford MP on Thursday 20th October 2022 in the Playfair Library at the University of Edinburgh (details below)





Medical Aid for Palestinians and the Global Health Academy of the University of Edinburgh invite you to attend

THE RUNA MACKAY LECTURE 2022

An evening celebrating the life, work and continuing influence of Dr Runa Mackay, her personal journey with the Palestinians and her commitment to peace and justice - including the first Runa Mackay lecture given by **Dr Philippa Whitford MP.**

THURSDAY 20TH OCTOBER 2022
6:30 PM TO 9:45 PM
DRINKS RECEPTION FROM 5.30PM

THE PLAYFAIR LIBRARY
THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
EH8 9YL

[Please follow this link to register your place](#)



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Global Health Academy

PROGRAMME

18.30 Welcome and introduction

- Runa Mackay's Life and Work, Anna Woolverton
- Life and Work in the Galilee, Dr Hatim Kanaaneh, co-founder of the Galilee Society
- Working with MAP, Dr Swee Chai Ang, founder of Medical Aid for Palestinians
- A medical student in Scotland and South Lebanon, Professor Ghassan Abu-Sitta, Professor of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery
- Hadeel, Carol Morton and Ross Campbell
- Fundraising for MAP in Edinburgh, Salwa Jones
- Women in Black, Pat Bryden
- The Iona Community, Rev Colin Douglas
- Musical interlude, Penny Stone

19.30

- Introduction to Dr Philippa Whitford MP
- The Runa Mackay Lecture 2022, "*A personal journey with the Palestinians*", Dr Philippa Whitford MP
- Questions and Discussion
- Invitation to the Reception

21.45 Close

VISIT OF RASHA AL MAGHONY TO SCOTLAND.

Gerry O'Hare

As an oncology nurse specialist with Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board, for 10 years I have been supporting cancer nurse education in Palestine, specifically working with Palestinian and UK colleagues to deliver the first Postgraduate Cancer Nursing Diploma in the occupied territory.

With my knowledge and experience of supporting Palestinian colleagues in cancer management, in 2018 I was asked by Medical Aid for Palestinians to contribute to a Breast Cancer mission to Gaza. The purpose of the mission was to support breast cancer management in Gaza. This support encompassed improved surgical techniques, optimising oncology management and the training of medical and nursing colleagues. The impact of the Israeli siege and blockade of Gaza contributes significantly to very poor outcomes for Gaza women diagnosed with breast cancer.

Missions to Gaza for myself and UK colleagues are supported in Gaza by Rasha Al Mohagny, MAP director of missions.



Rasha Al Maghony in the debating chamber of the Scottish Parliament

From the start of MAP's breast cancer missions to Gaza, Rasha has done a magnificent job coordinating our visits, supporting us and her nursing and medical colleagues in Gaza and ensuring that our time spent in Gaza is used to its maximum potential.

For Rasha to be such a vital contributor to the UK MAP breast cancer missions (in addition to the other missions she co-ordinates) Rasha has had to become skilled and knowledgeable in cancer management pathways from diagnosis to end of life care. Despite not having a medical or nursing background Rasha's knowledge of breast cancer management has developed and her knowledge and abilities have been integral to the development of a range of improvements in cancer management in Gaza including the crucial establishment of weekly breast cancer multi-disciplinary meetings between Scotland and Gaza and the establishment of the first cancer and palliative cancer conference in Gaza in 2019. The 3rd conference is planned for the spring of 2023.

Whilst on my last visit to Gaza on a breast cancer mission in November 2021 I invited Rasha to visit Glasgow for a holiday and relaxing trip to Scotland in return for her hard work with MAP. However, Rasha typically felt that a trip to Scotland should include an opportunity to share with groups in Scotland the challenges for health care in Gaza and MAP's work in Gaza. Quite soon MAP in Gaza and London recognized the impact that Rasha could have sharing the work of MAP with a range of politicians and civic groups in Scotland. Although Rasha's visit included advocacy work in London, this report focuses on her visit to Scotland.

Dr Abdullah Al-Hasso (Glasgow Oncology consultant and member of MAP missions to Gaza), Professor Graham Watt (MAP's Scottish Trustee) and I developed a programme for the short time Rasha and Halla (MAP's London-based Advocacy Officer) could spend in Scotland. The visit included meeting with MSP's in the Scottish Parliament (arranged by Jackie Baillie MSP), community faith groups and representatives of the Lord Provost's office in Glasgow.

The meeting with Scottish MSP's (four attended with additional six secretaries) was an important event where Rasha articulated the barriers to effective health care in Gaza caused by the blockade by Israel and the work of MAP to support health care in Gaza. This was a powerful presentation that engaged all those present, including those who felt familiar with the health politics of Gaza.

Jackie Baillie MSP wrote

"It was a really powerful meeting yesterday and I can't thank you and all of your colleagues enough for your time and insights."



Rasha's visit to meet representatives of the Lord Provost, was timely. We were informed that the recently appointed new Lord Provost of Glasgow, Jacqueline McLaren, is interested in visiting Glasgow's twinned city of Bethlehem. Rasha shared that MAP West Bank intends to hold a cancer conference in the West Bank in 2023 simultaneously with the third such conference in Gaza.

In addition to Rasha sharing the work of MAP in Gaza it was important that Rasha and Halla should enjoy some of the cultural highlights that Glasgow has to offer including Scotland's wonderful countryside !



Roseanne Logan, Rasha and Halla with Ben Lomond in the background

Abdulla Alhasso coordinated several meetings with local groups and writes

"I was delighted to have been able to welcome Rasha and Halla as part of the MAP team visiting Scotland. The short visit was fully utilized to engage with local organisations. On Sunday the 19th of June, Rasha and Halla had a series of very useful and productive meetings starting at the Bearsden Muslim Association and community centre (BMACC), followed by a zoom meeting with the Scottish Friends of Palestine (SFOP) and finally another meeting at the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB).

It was very useful and important to have a local representative from Gaza present in these meetings to talk about reality on the ground and to share their views and their suffering under the occupation and blockade. These meetings have already stimulated further ideas to support and raise funds for Palestine and in my opinion will provide a basis for longer term interaction and support. "



Following the visit Rasha reflected,

"This visit was an opportunity to highlight how 15 years of blockade have weakened the already overstretched healthcare system in Gaza, and have undermined its capacity to develop in line with the needs of the population. It was my greatest pleasure to visit the Scottish Parliament and to address MSPs, raising the overall health and humanitarian situation in Gaza today, and the role that MAP plays in supporting Palestinians' access to effective, sustainable and locally led systems of healthcare. Moreover, it was a chance to establish links with community-based organizations, and to thank UK experts for volunteering their time and efforts to support MAP's capacity building projects in Gaza. I was glad to be able to show how their support has transformed the delivery of breast cancer care in Gaza over the past five years and has contributed to changing and saving lives of Palestinian patients."

CONTINUED SUCCESS WITH STRENGTHENING APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY TRAINING AND PRACTICE IN PALESTINE

It has been gratifying to see continued successes from the Applied Psychology in Palestine (APiP) programme that is led by the team at the Guidance and Training Centre for the Child and Family (GTC) in Bethlehem. This project continues to work as a collaborative venture between GTC staff and Scottish partners from across health, education, and university sectors.

The 2021-22 academic year saw a new cohort of 10 interns enrol in the programme. As in previous years they have been exposed to a four module curriculum covering assessment, treatment, research, and professional functioning skills relevant to psychologists practicing in the Palestinian context. Although COVID19 disruptions continued to affect access to applied practice experiences the interns have had a good range of experiences of seeing young people and families in the clinic at GTC. We are hoping that access to school settings will increase so that the interns can hone their skills in applied practice in educational settings.

One area of development during the last year has been the opportunity for the intern group to learn about and contribute to the applied research work that is being conducted in collaboration with GTC members. This has included participation in data collection for funded studies examining the psychological features and correlates of Complex PTSD in young Palestinians. Work is also underway developing new modules addressing the advanced assessment and psychometric test use skills needed by applied psychologists in Palestine. This is an under-developed area and it is expected that adding this new module to the training programme will better equip practitioners for the important work they are doing to support children and families in the West Bank.



The visiting delegation and hosts in Glasgow City Chambers

Another positive change this year has been the return to in-person planning and programme improvement meetings. These opportunities to work together on reviewing and refining the APiP programme have been severely disrupted by the pandemic so we were delighted to be able to host a visit by senior members of the GTC team to Glasgow in May 2022.

As always, the ongoing support of several funders including MAP, Waldesian Church, Misereor, and NHSGGC Endowment fund is acknowledged and greatly appreciated.

Caesar Hakim and Hamish McLeod

A CLINICAL OBSERVERSHIP FOR A PALESTINIAN DOCTOR VISITING SCOTLAND



This example of Scottish Palestinian collaboration began with a request from Dr Hussein Jabareen, a PhD graduate from Glasgow University and now Dean of Nursing, Pharmacy and Medical Sciences at Hebron University, asking if it would be possible to arrange a clinical observership in Scotland for a young Palestinian doctor as the elective component of her first post-qualification year.

After exchanging her CV and credentials, a letter of invitation was sent so that it could accompany her visa application to the British Consul Office in Jerusalem. After 8 weeks of waiting the visa was granted.

The next step was to apply to Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board for permission for a clinical observership, providing access to clinical settings but with no clinical responsibility or role. This required the support of both clinicians willing to act as host and their general manager.

Dr Sufana Ajwa could then buy her plane ticket, travelling via Amman and Frankfurt.

A programme of visits was then put together including several clinics at the Beatson Oncology Centre in Glasgow, the Vale of Leven Hospital in Alexandria and a general practice in Edinburgh.

By chance, it transpired that Sufana had a friend in common with Jasmine Elhaj (See SPHF Newsletter No 4) a dentist from Glaza currently taking the Master of Public Health degree at Glasgow University, who offered accommodation for part of Sufana's four week visit.

In late June she arrived, spent a day recovering from the overnight journey and then started her programme of clinic visits.



Dr Sufana Ajwa and Gerry O'Hare at the Vale of Leven Hospital

This was the first time that the SPHF has used its contacts and connections to organise a clinical observership as part of the early professional experience of a recently qualified Palestinian doctor. The arrangements took time to fall into place but have established a precedent and a pathway which could be followed again in the future.

BREAST CANCER MISSION TO THE WEST BANK

After a thwarted attempt to spend a month long sabbatical in the West Bank in March 2020, I was delighted to be invited back in November 2021 for a week with Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP). The COVID-19 had cut short my trip in 2020 and still caused considerable issues for travel at the end of 2021, with the looming Omicron variant causing Israel to close its borders just hours after I had arrived and left the airport.

I have written for SPHF previously about our multidisciplinary team visits to the West Bank with MAP to help local partners develop the breast cancer services. Sadly I was travelling alone this time as the rest of the team were unable to visit, but MAP made sure of a busy productive schedule across Nablus, Beit Jala and East Jerusalem. Here's an update on the progress of the project.

Nablus: The main focus of our team's previous visits to the West Bank have been with an enthusiastic team in the Rafedia Hospital in Nablus, who were serving the north of the West Bank without a formalised breast cancer service.

COVID had not held back our counterparts in the Rafedia Hospital in Nabus. In a short time they transformed of the basement of the A&E department into a purpose built breast assessment unit during 2020-21, and it was an honour to be shown around the unit.



A new mammogram unit was waiting to be installed, a new ultrasound machine was in place, there was plenty of clinic room space and a well equipped room for MDT meetings. It was a privilege to see the team developing the ideas we discussed in 2018 and making them a reality. Patients are now being seen in this unit.

Beit Jala: The team have welcomed a new breast surgeon since my last visit, and it was a

pleasure to meet Dr Izildeen and discuss his plans for the service in Beit Jala. Particularly useful was the visit of the breast surgeon, radiologist and nurse from Rafedia Hospital, Nablus, who had not visited the breast unit in Beit Jala before. This was a great opportunity for the two teams to meet and share ideas.

East Jerusalem: I was grateful to be hosted by the new Chief Surgeon at Augusta Victoria Hospital, Dr Abufara, for the weekly breast multidisciplinary team meeting, providing the opportunity to meet with members of the wider team and to discuss clinical cases and the impact of COVID-19 on their hospital. I was also given a tour around the expanded radiotherapy department that serves the entire West Bank and Gaza. For comparison there are five radiotherapy centres in Scotland serving a similar size population.

Reflections:

Palestinians are well placed to teach the world about living in lockdown: without the ability to travel beyond a small perimeter of one's home, with shortages of essential items and the fragility of life an everyday reality. Above all, my experience of being there is to witness ingenuity, resilience, and tenacity to overcome the enormous challenges of daily living. One of the best illustrations of this on this visit was the building of an entire breast unit during a time when so many of us hunkered down to withstand the pandemic. I hope I have learned to apply this in the increasingly challenging work of providing breast cancer services here in Scotland.

Jane Macaskill
Consultant Breast Surgeon
Dundee



A VISIT TO THE WEST BANK

A couple of years ago I was invited to Jerusalem to take part in Kalimat International Book Festival. I'm a GP and writer who has written books about the human body, medical humanities, the allure of islands, and polar regions, and the festival wanted me to contribute to evening events in Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Haifa. Over those days I went back and forwards through the concrete barrier of the occupied territory many times, and noticed security cameras propped on every vantage point, as if to memorialise all the fear that was being generated.

At one checkpoint a teenager cursed with acne put on a show of boredom as he went through the contents of my bag. I felt a paternal impulse to offer him some dermatological advice; his own fear was palpable and reminded me that fear and aggression occupy the same circuits in the brain, and have the same triggers. Psychologists have shown that the more fearful a human, the more aggressive they are.

My visits to health clinics in the occupied territory had been organised by a friend of the festival, Raja Shehadeh. At a cardiology clinic in Ramallah I observed echocardiograms, ECGs, exercise tolerance tests, paediatric murmur assessments, all intimately familiar from my own practice in Edinburgh. Though my own clinical practice is funded through general taxation from one of the world's busiest economies, there it had to be funded almost entirely through international aid.

One of the healthcare workers took me out on her rounds. We visited a woman paralysed from birth, catheter-dependent, obliged to use a wheelchair, yet who, thanks to the patient and loving support of her family, lived in a house unreachable except by steps on the summit of a hill. She wore impeccable hijab, and told me in a tiny, high-pitched voice of her gratitude for the care she receives – the welcome with which medicine is received almost everywhere. The needs of someone who has been paralysed are borderless – physiotherapy, catheter care, skin care, infection control. As we checked her legs, her catheter, her skin for ulcers, I thought of patients in Edinburgh for whom I've done the same, of others across the border, in Israel, for whom the same must be done.

As a doctor interested in the worldwide fraternity of medicine there was an immediate sense of familiarity on arriving in village clinics north of Ramallah. In the waiting rooms there were public health posters; in the clinic rooms themselves thermometers, blood pressure cuffs, trolleys for taking blood, examination couches. Each had a small laboratory identical to the ones I remember from my own training. I helped out in a vaccination clinic, impressed by the assiduous record-keeping, the comprehensive vaccination regime that was aspired to – the universality of good quality healthcare.

The doctor on duty that day told me he'd been unable to study medicine anywhere in the Levant; instead he'd studied first in Yugoslavia, then in France, then in Norway, learning the language of each of these adopted countries as he went. Another doctor I met studied in Belarus, and spoke English, Arabic, French, Russian, Belarussian, with ease. The borderlessness of his training was striking, as was the imposition of the borders under which he had to operate.

Raja asked if I'd give a lecture to the staff of Augusta Victoria Hospital. On my way to the auditorium I passed a framed reproduction of Rembrandt's famous *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaas Tulp* – a reproduction of which also hung in the entranceway of my medical school in Edinburgh. Its presence here in Jerusalem spoke to the universality of medical practice. With a flourish of his hand, Tulp reveals to his enraptured audience how the differences between human beings are illusory; anatomists have always known that race is a myth, something confirmed now by geneticists.



The German novelist WG Sebald wrote of this painting 'the anatomy lessons given every year in the depth of winter by Dr Nicolaas Tulp were not only of the greatest interest to a student of medicine but constituted in addition a significant date in the agenda of a society that saw itself as emerging from the darkness into the light.' Tulp's students were drawn from across Europe, pulled towards the city of Amsterdam for its spirit of open enquiry, for that city's belief that dissent in matters of religion should never be allowed to distort politics.

Later that evening, as I waited with a queue of Palestinians to pass through yet another checkpoint, I couldn't help thinking of another of Sebald's books, *Austerlitz*, the protagonist of which is a Jewish architectural historian. He notes: 'the more you entrench yourself the more you must remain on the defensive, so that in the end you might find yourself in a place fortified in every possible way.'

Gavin Francis



APPEARANCES AT THE EDINBURGH BOOK FESTIVAL

Gavin Francis will appear at the Edinburgh Book Festival on Saturday 27th August from 17.30 – 18.30 in the Baillie Gifford Sculpture Court, in a joint session with Lucy Easthope on *Coming Back to Ourselves After Disaster*, based on his recent book *Recovery. The Lost Art of Convalescence*.

Raja Shehadeh will appear at the Edinburgh Book Festival on Tuesday 15th August from 13.00 – 14.00 in the Baillie Gifford Sculpture Court in a session on *To Absent Fathers* based on his recent book *We Could Have Been Friends : My Father and I*.

INTRODUCING DR KHAMIS ELESSI

I first met Khamis Elessi in a hotel foyer in Gaza City in 2010, accompanying Sir Iain Chalmers who was keen to find a Palestinian champion for evidence-based medicine. Khamis had a presentation on his lap top which more than met Sir Iain's aspirations.



Sir Iain Chalmers, Khamis Elessi and Graham Watt

In the next ten years Khamis pioneered evidence-based medicine in the Gaza Strip, encouraging colleagues to review their work, compare it with international guidelines and share the results with colleagues. It was a culture shift, taking such activity out of the margins and into the mainstream.

Evidence of this shift could be seen in the increasing number of abstracts submitted to conferences of the Lancet Palestinian Health Alliance (LPHA) on applications of clinical audit – many more from Gaza than from the West Bank.

Khamis pursued his interest by taking a postgraduate degree from Oxford



Khamis has been an indefatigable attender of LPHA conferences, overcoming the many obstacles to leaving Gaza. At the last LPHA conference before the Covid pandemic, which was held in Amman, Jordan, Khamis left via Gaza via the Rafah crossing and spent 24 hours negotiating the many checkpoints in the Sinai desert to arrive on the final day of the conference – to great audience applause.

He relaxed by reading *The Lancet* while floating in the Dead Sea.



Khamis turned his attention to palliative medicine, providing local support for the work of Dr Mhoira Leng (See SPHF Newsletter No 2). To further his knowledge and skills, Khamis sought support from Cairdeas, Mhoira's Aberdeen-based charity supporting palliative care projects in several countries, to attend the King Hussein Cancer Centre in Amman, Jordan for a month, learning from their expertise and experience in palliative care. Mhoira asked colleagues in the SPHF and also Edinburgh Direct for financial help and several were happy to oblige – on the sole condition that Khamis would write a report for the SPHF newsletter.

His report follows overleaf.

MY FATHER PASSED AWAY IN PAIN BUT NOT IN VAIN: REFLECTIONS ON PALLIATIVE CARE FROM A NEUROREHABILITATION & PAIN MEDICINE CONSULTANT

Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.

Soren Kierkegard

2010 was the turning point in my life, I was an energetic, focused and well known specialist of Neurorehabilitation & Pain, successfully treating and helping thousands of severely injured patients and people with disabilities.

I have chaired the medical rehabilitation team at Elwafa Medical Rehabilitation Hospital in Gaza City, Palestine for 13 years and have provided consultations for patients with stroke, head injury, and spinal cord injury with the goal of returning patients to normal or near-normal activities as quickly and safely as possible, I focused on maximizing patient's function and optimizing their quality of life through a thorough assessment and a comprehensive rehabilitation and pain-relief plan.

But at the beginning of 2010, my late father started to suffer from difficulty swallowing and was diagnosed with adenocarcinoma of the lower third of the oesophagus. With no metastatic lesions, he was advised by many consultants to undergo surgery in an advanced centre and since we don't have any such centre in the Palestinian territories, we opted to refer him to an advanced Israeli hospital in Tel-Aviv. Unfortunately, I was not given a permission to accompany him, so my mother who has no professional knowledge was the only option to join him.

After he underwent the surgery successfully, he spoke to me the next day complaining of severe pain all over his chest and back. He couldn't breathe well and was crying for some analgesics. I tried many times to speak to the doctors in charge in that hospital, trying to convince them that my dad was suffering and craving for pain medications, but they always insisted that they knew what was best for him.

With persistent complaints from my dad being ignored from the other side, he started to develop chest infections and then renal impairment. A few days later, they decided to insert a jejunostomy tube for feeding which mistakenly passed the correct location and penetrated into the peritoneal cavity, leading to peritonitis and later renal failure which unfortunately ended with the death of my father.

The news of death left me in shock. It was the most traumatic and dramatic event I have ever experienced, but that same catastrophic event left me thinking of the thousands of helpless

patients with cancer, organ failure, cardiac problems and incurable disease who are left suffering alone with their families in a daily basis inside our hospital and in their homes.

This forced me to a turning point in my life and career and encouraged me to start an initiative in the Gaza strip to promote and integrate the principles and skills of palliative care and pain management to all doctors, nurses and medical students.

From a medical and ethical perspective, every person has the right to live and die with dignity. I started the journey and faced the bitter and the sweet, setting myself on a path to implement and improve palliative care.

In the Gaza Strip, which is a tiny piece of land along the Mediterranean with more than 2.2 million individuals (more than 75% of them are refugees with limited electricity and water supply and unable to meet the cost of their medications) and with a protracted siege for the last 15 years and repeated wars and aggressions with Israel that has left thousands killed and tens of thousands injured and left with disabilities or intolerable pain and suffering, the implementation of a palliative care program has been challenging and full of obstacles.

There is a lack of knowledge, attitudes and practice and furthermore no strong analgesics for people with cancer and other pathologies such as advanced heart, lung and kidney diseases. Since then I have not stop organizing and conducting tens of workshops and training days in this new field of mine. But in 2015, this initiative received a strong boost from my elegant friend Dr Liz Grant of Edinburgh University when I discussed my work with her and asked for her support. She nominated the world-renowned Dr. Mhoira Leng, who has made a massive input and together we have amazing achievements.

My first initiative was to promote palliative care and comprehensive pain management in 2011 through 2015 with workshops which targeted around 300 doctors and health professionals from different hospitals. Their new knowledge was positively reflected in the lives of thousands of needy patients.

From 2014-2021, together with consultants from the UK, I started developing and implementing a special module for pain and palliative care for medical students in the Islamic University of Gaza. We then organized 10 workshops for more doctors and health professionals to encourage their adoption and integration of palliative care concepts into the medical curriculum and practice.

In January, 2018, I started a series of lectures and training sessions for the medical staff of the main paediatric oncology hospital in Gaza which culminated in the creation of the first palliative care team including a psychologist and spiritual healers to directly serve cancer patients. The patients' feedback was very encouraging and motivational for me to go further .

On, the 25th -26th of October 2018, we organized the 1st international conference in Palestine on “Pain management & palliative care in Palestine”. It was attended by more than 500 doctors and health professionals including consultants from the USA, Norway, Britain, Uganda and Japan.



Kahmis Elsessi, first on the left; Mhoira Leng third from the right

In February-March of 2022, I spent more than a month in one of the biggest centres in the Middle East, the King Hussain Cancer Center (KHCC) in Amman, Jordan which specializes in cancer and palliative care. The main purpose of my visit was to see the on-site application of palliative care in a modern facility; to exchange knowledge about how best to apply and overcome obstacles, to strengthen our joint collaboration in the field of mutual patient care and palliative care and finally to boost our joint teaching and training potential to design and kick start a Palliative Care Diploma program for Gaza health professionals. The visit, hosted by Dr Omar Shamieh, achieved all my planned objectives, and more. The knowledge and experiences I gained have been and are still being disseminated among more and more health professionals in the Gaza Strip. The trip was kindly funded by the CairdeasIPCT Travelling Fellows Scholarship Programme. I am truly grateful for their kindness and generosity.

In short, the demise of my lovely father in pain was a big loss for me, for my family and for many people who loved him but what I am sure of is that my Dad's death was not in vain as it has changed my perception of holistic patient care and led me to start a series of workshops, training courses, and an international conference and later integrate this unique health service

in 2 of our major hospitals in the besieged Gaza strip. This new service has and will still benefit thousands of patients, their families, the doctors and care givers.

Finally, without the indispensable role of Mhoira Leng, Liz Grant, Colin Cooper, Denis Rutovitz and Graham Watt, as well as the kind support from CairdeasIPCT, I wouldn't be able to accomplish these achievements and materialize my dreams on the ground.

Khamis Elessi



Khamis Elessi, Graham Watt and Mhoira Leng

HOME THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD

(NOTE : Regular readers of this newsletter may recall contributions from Ihab Saleh, a doctor from Gaza (SPHF Newsletter No 2). It was Ihab who got up early to travel from Glasgow to Edinburgh and back before his working day, simply for the novelty and pleasure of being able to move freely. Updating us with his whereabouts, he wrote the following.)

I was working in Glasgow, had achieved full registration with the GMC and had received job offers to work in the NHS. But at that stage, I had a lot of time to think about my priorities, social life, safety in the UK, UK citizenship, ties to the homeland, and other factors. A major consideration was the fact that my stay in the UK would largely benefit myself and my personal future while supporting the health system in the UK which has thousands of people and billions of pounds to rely on, so I would not make such a difference.

But the case would be very different if I went back to Gaza. I decided to go back to Gaza during March 2021 with my fiancée Hala, who was studying at Durham University. We got to know each other in the UK but returned to Gaza in order to be able to support our people and make a difference as much as we can. as little as we can do, but still counting in the Gaza context. We got married among family and friends in a traditional Palestinian wedding. Check it out here: [Palestinian Wedding Report](#)



Hala is an activist who is very much interested in social action, community behaviour and the effect of post-colonial approach on gender-based violence in Gaza. Last September, she started her PhD in Newcastle University, which helped me get a dependent's visa for visiting the UK. Part of the first year of her PhD was in Gaza, and part in the UK. So we are trying to arrange going back and forth between Gaza and the UK, aiming to balance our contributions to Gaza and her studies to eventually contribute to social activism in Gaza. This is our short term plan. We do not know about any long term plans as this is a luxury that is not available to Gaza people.

I worked for a while as the medical coordinator for Medicos del Mundo (Doctors of the World - Spain), and currently I'm working as the National Medical Officer for the United Nations Mine Action Service - UNMAS. Other UK nationals work at the Gaza office and they are very supportive. It is a very rewarding job in terms of the effect and positive impact that it has on a large number of Gaza population. It has been a rollercoaster, but very fulfilling.

Ihab Saleh



NEWS FROM MAP



Despite the ongoing escalations in violence across the oPt and the challenges facing many of our local partner organisations including raids on their premises and obstructions to their work, we are delighted to have started several new projects in the last few months, in particular, expanding our disability portfolio. This includes an innovative new project in Gaza on sexual reproductive health and rights for women and girls with autism and learning difficulties. New work supporting disability organisations in the West Bank will promote the role of disability rights advocates.

We are excited to be in the process of developing a new five-year strategy for 2023 – 2027 and are carrying out consultations with partners, communities and other stakeholders to ensure it meets MAP's needs in the years ahead.

Accountability is core to MAP's values, and as such we are working to strengthen our feedback processes in our local offices and across our programmes, so that the communities we work with have access to safe, effective and responsive mechanisms to raise concerns or give feedback.

Continuing support to Ministry of Health and Palestine Red Crescent Society

As we mark one year on from the May 2021 11-day military offensive in Gaza, MAP continues supporting the Palestinian health service as well as the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS). PRCS were at the frontline during recent escalations in tensions in East Jerusalem and the West Bank during Ramadan with their medical teams and ambulances once again coming under attack. MAP is procuring and fully equipping two ambulances for PRCS, to be delivered later in the year.

Our programme of regular training missions to the West Bank and Gaza have resumed with enthusiasm this year, with volunteers keen to catch up with Palestinian colleagues working in limb reconstruction, psychiatry, neurosurgery, breast cancer and family medicine. New vascular surgery and haematology projects began in Gaza earlier this year and in total, 45 training missions are due to take place in 2022. A huge thanks to all our dedicated volunteers without whom this work would not be possible.

West Bank Breast cancer care

This week (20th June) saw the latest breast cancer care mission to the West Bank. Our volunteers were delighted to be working for the first time in the brand new, fully equipped breast unit in Rafedia Hospital in Nablus, having been instrumental in its design back in November 2019.



The focus of this mission was on assessing workflow in the unit and training local staff in the use of the new mammography machine. A follow up mission will take place in late July with a full multidisciplinary group.

We are keen to recruit new breast cancer care nurses to our Palestine-wide breast cancer care project. If you have any colleagues who may be interested in getting involved, please direct them to melanie.coyne@map-uk.org

Evaluating MAP's impact

This year we are excited to be piloting a new approach to the evaluation of our work, for both projects we are delivering directly and those we're delivering with local partners. We will be applying a human-rights lens to the evaluation of all projects, utilising an internationally accredited framework that assesses:

(a) Availability

(b) Accessibility - i). Non-discrimination. ii). Physical accessibility. iii). Economic accessibility (affordability). iv). Information accessibility.

(c) Acceptability

(d) Quality – all services should be: safe; effective; people-centred; timely; equitable; integrated; and efficient.

(e) Accountability

(f) Participation

This approach will be combined with ever greater efforts to evaluate the impact of our work; to help us understand if our medium and longer-term objectives are being achieved for individual projects and our programmatic priorities as a whole.

Scottish Challenge & Fundraising events

MAP's Scottish fundraisers have been as busy as ever this year, with great representation at the Loony Dook and a very successful Water of Leith walk/run/cycles event. Keep an eye out for their fundraising events throughout the year. To get involved please email: fundraising@map-uk.org



Keep in touch!

Please sign up to MAP's newsletter to read the latest on access to healthcare in the oPt and refugee camps of Lebanon and updates on our work: <https://www.map.o.uk/news/e-newsletter-signup>

Melanie Coyne
MAP Senior Programme Manager

SCOTTISH PALESTINIAN HEALTH FACULTY

The SPHF is not a formal organisation, but an informal network of colleagues willing to share their experiences, information and news, including :-

- Palestinian health professionals and health researchers who have trained or studied in Scotland
- Palestinian health professionals and health researchers currently working and living in Scotland
- Scottish health professionals and health researchers, at home or abroad, with links and activities in Palestine

The terms “Scottish” and “Palestinian” are considered broadly in terms of having family or residential connections with either Scotland or Palestinian communities in the OPT (the State of Palestine), Lebanon or elsewhere. Our aims are :-

- To promote Scottish Palestinian health collaboration
- To support the development of health and health care in Palestine

which we hope to achieve by :-

- connecting Scottish and Palestinian colleagues working in the health field
- sharing experience, information, evidence, views and plans
- developing new activities involving Scottish Palestinian health collaboration
- supporting Palestinian health professionals and researchers visiting Scotland
- raising the profile and impact of Scottish Palestinian health collaboration

Apart from the above aims, the SPHF does not have a representative function or collective view. The views expressed in this newsletter are those of individual contributors.

SCOTTISH PALESTINIAN HEALTH FACULTY



Contact: graham.watt@glasgow.ac.uk