

# SCOTTISH PALESTINIAN HEALTH PARTNERSHIP



## NEWSLETTER, MAY 2026

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this Newsletter of the Scottish Palestinian Health Partnership, which aims to bring members up to date and to attract new members to the Partnership.

The most topical issue is the 5<sup>th</sup> SPHP Conference on **Tackling Disability in Gaza**, to be held at Glasgow University on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2026. Philippa Whitford introduces the conference (Page 3), including a weblink for registration. We also introduce two of the speakers from Gaza, Dr Khalil Kalidi and Dr Khamis Elessi (Pages 20 and 21, respectively).

The Conference on 13<sup>th</sup> June is also important in setting a precedent for how new partnerships can be established between Scottish and Palestinian colleagues.

Colleagues who couldn't attend the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference on **Speaking up Against Injustice** on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2026 (Page 5), or who wish to re-visit the highlights, can do so by viewing a 20 minute video (Page 6). Films of previous SPHP conferences are also available.

Clinical visits to the West Bank and Gaza, which were the common experience of the founders of the SPHP, have been difficult if not impossible to arrange, but Janet Litherland reports on her breast cancer mission to Hebron with MAP (Page 15) and David Sedgwick reports on Surgical Training in the West Bank (Page 16). Mhoira Leng reports on several international linkages (Page 27)

Gerry O'Hare and Abdulla Alhasso report several bits of good news concerning relationships with Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board (Page 10). We hope this may set a precedent for other Health Boards in Scotland

Graham Watt

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May 2026

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## SPHP CONFERENCE NO 5, 13<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2026 AT GLASGOW UNIVERSITY

### TACKLING DISABILITY IN GAZA: SUPPORTING EXPANSION OF THE REHABILITATION WORKFORCE.

The Scottish Palestinian Health Partnership (SPHP), launched in April 2024, brought together volunteers who had worked in Palestine or provided clinical training online, with those keen to offer support in the future.

Many of the projects focussed on establishing longterm training partnerships with clinical colleagues with a view to strengthening the multidisciplinary approach to cancer treatment. It included such projects as the Breast Cancer Partnership in Gaza and the West Bank and the ongoing cancer nursing exchange program between Bethlehem University and the Beatson Oncology Centre.

With the indiscriminate slaughter and destruction in Gaza over the last 30 months, there is now an urgent need to consider not just the appalling death toll, as yet not fully quantified, but the 170,000 injured and the overwhelming burden of disability which Gaza will face for decades to come.



**SCOTTISH PALESTINIAN HEALTH PARTNERSHIP**

**Free Entry – donations to cover costs welcome.**  
<https://scotpalhp.org/5678-2/>

### Trauma-induced disability in Gaza: Supporting Rehabilitation Service Recovery

**Dr Khamis Elessi** – Professor of Neurorehabilitation, Islamic University Gaza  
**Dr Khalil Khalidy** - Orthopaedic Surgeon, Al Aqsa Hospital, Gaza Strip  
**Dr Walid Hamdan**, Physiotherapist, Gaza Prosthetics & Orthotics Committee Chair  
**Heba Bashir** - Senior Prosthetist, Artificial Limb & Polio Centre, Gaza  
**Dr Tony McGarry** - MSc Prosthetics and Orthotics Director, University of Strathclyde

**Conference: Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2026**  
**Registration: 12.30 Start 1pm Finish 4.30pm**  
James McCune Learning Hub, University of Glasgow ([click here for map](#))  
For **in person** attendance tickets [click here](#)  
If you want to join via Zoom please register and then email [info@scotpalhp.org](mailto:info@scotpalhp.org) and put “Disability Conference” in the subject line



The majority of Gazans are suffering from traumatic stress disorder - it cannot be described as ‘post-traumatic’ as the genocide continues despite a supposed ceasefire - which is in addition to the physical and sensory damage caused by the indiscriminate bombing of civilians within such a small area.

Gaza has the highest amputation rate in the world, of children as well as adults, due both to immediate traumatic amputation but also to the desperate lack of healthcare provision which has restricted options for limb salvage and preservation. This latter was caused by the targeting of hospitals and healthcare staff as well as the blockade of crucial medical supplies.

Emergency medical teams have reported children sustaining head or spinal injuries from Israeli sniper fire which appeared to deliberately target children. Those who survived the original devastating injury are likely to face severe life-altering disability.

It is reported that over 30,000 people in Gaza are suffering from various degrees of hearing-loss due to the bombing, yet Israel has blocked hearing aids from entering the Strip.

One threat which is not sufficiently aired is the impact of malnutrition on the brain development of infants born during the genocide and the risk of learning difficulties due to Israel's indefensible policy of using starvation as a weapon of war.

The list seems overwhelming and instead of a multinational humanitarian response to rebuild Gazan healthcare, Israel continues to block medical missions and medical supplies, even as basic as crutches.

However, with our warm homes and plenty of food, we have no right to despair but need to be creative about how we can support our healthcare colleagues in Gaza to rebuild their healthcare service and face the scale of the challenge ahead of them.

We can learn from the example of the Gaza Breast Cancer Project, which included a weekly online multidisciplinary team meeting which strengthened relationships and allowed continuous knowledge exchange, both of which were key to its success. Similarly, PalMed Academy provided sustained online undergraduate medical teaching to deliver a full graduating class at the end of 2025.

We therefore need to explore how we can maximise online teaching and training while Israel continues to block training team visits.

With this in mind and seeing the shocking amputation rate in the early months of the conflict, we reached out to the National Centre for Prosthetics and Orthotics (NCPO) to discuss how we could establish a Rehabilitation Partnership with colleagues in Gaza and support the expansion of the rehabilitation workforce in Gaza, including orthopaedic surgeons, physiotherapists and prosthetists. With Israel still blocking external medical teams, such a project would initially be delivered online by sharing teaching and training materials as well as holding regular case discussion meetings.

SPHP will host a conference on the subject at Glasgow University on Saturday the 13th of June, when we will hear from four Gazan colleagues as well as a representative from NCPO. The Eventbrite link is shown below and I hope all of you will reach out to rehabilitation specialists within your own hospital and region to recruit those who may be willing and able to support establishing such a vital partnership.



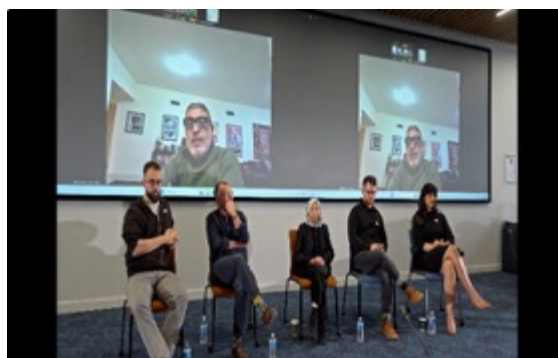
**Philippa Whitford**  
**Organiser of SPHP Conference No 5**

To register for the conference on 13<sup>th</sup> June, please click on the link below. Although on-line attendance is possible (see flyer above) we very much hope for a good attendance in person on the day.

<https://onedrive.live.com/?redeem=aHR0cHM6Ly8xZHZJ2Lm1zL2YvYy9jYWUzMmY5MDQzZWY1MDQ1L0lnQm5uelZwU09YZ1FxUHQ2dHVycmJPRkFUaC1Ea1JnbngxZzJ1a1VoNTVvZmJvP2U9ckxyQ2Qx&cid=CAE32F9043EF5045&id=CAE32F9043EF5045%21se009897f5cdd44259998301b014717b0&parId=CAE32F9043EF5045%21s69359f67e54842e0a3edeadbabadb385&o=OneUp>

**SPHP CONFERENCE SATURDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2026 UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

The flyer features the logos of the Scottish Palestinian Health Partnership and the University of Glasgow. The title is 'Speaking up against injustice: Intimidation of UK Health Workers Supporting Palestine'. The text describes the conference's focus on human rights and lists speakers: Dr Ghassan Abu-Sitta (Plastic Reconstructive Surgeon), Dr Ang Beeb Chai (Orthopaedic Surgeon), Dr Thomas Ali Glasgow (Trauma GP), Mr Francis Mugerwa (UK Barrister), and Dr James Smith (Lecturer in Humanitarian Studies). It includes a 'Click here to obtain a ticket' link and a graphic of a scale of justice with a medical cross.



SPHP Board members Gerry O Hare, Abdulla Alhasso and Uma Nada-Rajah facilitated the 4<sup>th</sup> SPHP conference entitled “*Speaking Up against Injustice: Intimidation of UK Health Workers Supporting Palestine*”.

An impressive one hundred and sixty delegates attended this event. We were fortunate to attract some of the most prominent UK advocates of Palestine Health Care to attend and present at this conference.

The evaluation from delegates was excellent. The theme resonated with UK health workers in attendance who at times feel threatened to vocalise support for Palestine. In addition, the conference encouraged solidarity between Scottish Healthcare workers and many of our English colleagues who currently are subject to punitive measures to silence advocacy for Palestine.

As with previous conferences this event was free to attend, we were fortunate to secure donations from SPHP members that covered the travel costs of three of the presenters who travelled from London. The SPHP are committed to free entry to future SPHP conferences.

To view a 20 minute video of conference highlights, see below

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF PREVIOUS SPHP CONFERENCES**

First and second conferences are on the SPHP website ([www.scotpalhp.org](http://www.scotpalhp.org)). Look under Event Highlights.

Third conference: (June 14th 2025) *Sustaining Health and Healthcare in a Time of Genocide* will appear on the SPHP website shortly.

Fourth conference (21st March 2026) *Speaking Up Against Injustice: Intimidation of UK Health Workers supporting Palestine* is currently available via this link

<https://onedrive.live.com/?redeem=aHR0cHM6Ly8xZHJ2Lm1zL2YvYy9jYWUzMmY5MDQzZWY1MDQ1L0lnRFdrVVprdxI0cFFLbjJqNFIHYjh4cUFZVHhGVjVIUjJkOGdHMkdJUWw1MzINP2U9ZmhESE1L&cid=CAE32F9043EF5045&id=CAE32F9043EF5045%21s25817e48aac7487fae0403d91169ab97&parId=CAE32F9043EF5045%21s1fc3d0d867454b609815457fb2a02920&o=OneUp>

## HISTORY OF THE SCOTTISH PALESTINIAN HEALTH PARTNERSHIP (SPHP)

The origin of the SPHP lay in the Scottish Palestinian Health Faculty, a loose network of colleagues, mostly with experience of clinical visits to Gaza and the West Bank, who shared their experiences via 8 editions of the SPHF Newsletter between 2020 and early 2023.

The events of October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023 spurred the group into action. At a meeting in November 2023, including a visit from Humsam Zomlot (now the Palestinian Ambassador to the UK), it was decided to rename the SPHF as the Scottish Palestinian Health Partnership, with a formal constitution and the following aim and objectives.

### **Aims**

To collaborate in support of the development of health and health care in Palestine

### **Objectives**

In order to achieve its aim the SPHP network will

- connect Scottish and Palestinian colleagues working to support health projects and training in the Occupied Palestinian Territory
- share experience, information, evidence, views and activities
- develop new activities involving Scottish Palestinian health collaboration
- work in partnership with Government, the Scottish NHS, Universities and other bodies supporting health care in Palestine
- use telemedicine and multidisciplinary meetings for continuing education, audit and quality improvement
- support Palestinian health professionals and researchers visiting Scotland
- raise the profile and impact of Scottish Palestinian health collaboration

The SPHP is now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year. Clinical visits to Gaza and the West Bank have been more difficult, especially because the need has been for emergency care while the expertise of leading SPHP colleagues has mostly been in cancer care, palliative care and mental health. The SPHP has been busy, however, and is now approaching its 5<sup>th</sup> conference, as reported elsewhere in this newsletter (Page 3), and has been active on a wide range of advocacy activities.

In addressing future needs, the Partnership continues to plan for clinical visits and educational activities (delivered face to face and remotely) in collaboration with Palestinian colleagues, while advocating Palestinian human rights, based on truth and justice.



The SPHP was first imagined on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at the Common Ground, 344 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow.

## SPHP MEMBERSHIP

On 1<sup>st</sup> May 2026 there were 150 members, an increase of 17 since October 2025.

131 were full members and 19 were recorded as donors.

Of the 130 who noted their profession there were:

- 73 medical doctors
- 9 academics
- 10 nurses
- 9 psychologists or psychological therapists
- 10 students (of various health disciplines)
- 5 pharmacists
- 3 work in IT
- 14 others

7 of the 130 noted that they were retired.

The categories showing the greatest increase are medical doctors and “others” which notably included two NHS health board members.

37 members indicated that they had (ever) been to Palestine while 33 members reported that they spoke Arabic.

## **Comment**

SPHP continues to grow at a modest rate, with conferences continuing to be the main activity which leads to sharper increases in numbers.



**Graham Bryce**  
**SPHP Membership Secretary**

## **JOINING THE SPHP**

Membership of the Partnership is open to any health worker or researcher over 18 or any healthcare-related organisation, charity or NGO in Scotland which is interested in helping the Partnership achieve its aims, is willing to abide by the rules of the Partnership and is willing to pay the subscription agreed by the Executive Group.

The subscription stands at £10 per annum and has been set at this level so that membership is affordable for a wide range of potential members. For this modest amount members join an increasing network of Scottish health workers and students committed to supporting health and health care for Palestinians living under occupation and/or as refugees.

Members are added automatically to the SPHP Members Whatsapp group, which is a constant source of news and views.

So far the main recruiting ground for new members has been the SPHP Conferences which have been free to attend and are open both to members and potential new members.

To join the SPHP, please go to <https://scotpalhp.org/become-a-member/>

## **DONATING TO THE SPHP**

As the costs of conferences, including the expenses of visiting speakers, has increased, the £10 annual subscription is insufficient to cover the SPHP's annual budget. For this reason, members renewing their subscriptions, and colleagues attending conferences have been asked to donate what they can afford and, so far, this has been a sustainable arrangement.

To donate to the SPHP, please go to <https://scotpalhp.org/5678-2/>

## **DEVELOPMENTS IN GREATER GLASGOW AND CLYDE HEALTH BOARD**

### **Glasgow & Clyde Health Board Support Of Health Care In Palestine**

Over the last 12 months Gerry O Hare and Dr Abdulla Al Hasso (both GGC employees working in oncology) have had several meetings with the GGC board and individual board members. GGC board have been supportive of health care initiatives developed by Gerry and Abdulla and Palestinian health colleagues. Several strands of support are being developed, explored and discussed.

Gerry and Abdulla are grateful to the GGC board (and GGC colleagues) for the Palestinian solidarity shown and hope to be able to announce important developments and agreements between GGC and Palestinian Health Service later in 2026.

### **NHS/GGC Health Awards**

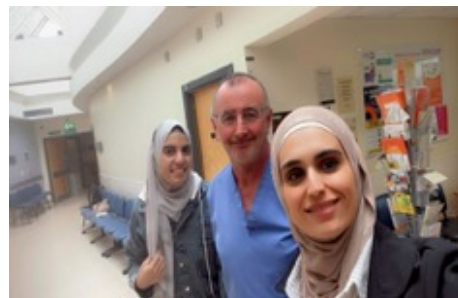
Abdullah Alhasso and Gerry O'Hare were nominated for the Global Citizenship award for Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board 2025. We were delighted that they won the award with Abdullah attending the dinner to accept on their behalf. Further to this Abdulla, Gerry and Janet Litherland were also nominated and were finalists in the Global Citizenship category for Scotland's Health awards this year, attending the event in November. Their contribution was acknowledged by Neil Grey, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, who sent a personal letter at Christmas.



Abdulla Alhasso receiving the GG&C Award

### Clinical Placement of Palestinian Cancer Nurses in GGC Settings

Ebba and Suhad (Palestinian cancer nurses) spent a valuable 2 weeks in August 2025 on clinical placement in GGC settings. This was the first time both nurses had visited the UK and we are grateful to GGC board and GGC colleagues for facilitating this important clinical placement. Ebba and Suhad also met members of the Scottish Trade Union movement (Unison and Unite) who have sponsored and financially supported the placement of Palestinian cancer nurses to Glasgow clinical settings.



It was planned for a further three nurses enrolled on the Cancer Nursing Masters at Bethlehem University to spend time on clinical placement in GGC sites in April 2026. Unfortunately, UK immigration, despite the nurses seemingly complying with study visa regulations, were denied a study visa. The ongoing Israeli attacks in Palestine and Lebanon may have influenced the visa refusal for these students.

The exchange programme facilitated by SPHP Board member Gerry O Hare has been established for 10 years and all parties involved are determined that despite the recent setback the programme will continue.

## **NURSING DEPARTMENTS BETHLEHEM UNIVERSITY/UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

SPHP board members Gerry O Hare is supporting formal links between the nursing departments of the University of Glasgow and Bethlehem.

Senior academics in both nursing departments have now developed a framework where academic staff at the Nursing Dept at the University of Glasgow will support the Cancer Nursing Masters at Bethlehem University through teaching and supervision of the thesis of Palestinian students.

This groundbreaking initiative is the result of the dedication and commitment to improving knowledge and clinical skills of cancer nursing from the Professor of Nursing University of Glasgow and the lead of the Masters in Cancer and Palliative care at Bethlehem University.

## **PALESTINIAN ADVOCACY**

Gerry O Hare and Dr Abdulla Alhasso have used their positions within GGC to advocate for Palestinian Health Care.

Joint presentations to NHS colleagues in 2025/26 have included :-

- GGC Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) annual meeting 2025
- GGC Glasgow “Grand Rounds” Education platform 2026
- GGC Board Meeting 2026
- Health Care in Conflict. The Centre for Research in Arts Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) 2026
- UNISON/UNITE Scottish Trade Union Branches 2025/26

## **Health Workers For Palestine (HW4P)**

Gerry O’Hare and Abdulla Alhasso are involved in grass roots advocacy across a range of organisations in 2025/26 including SPSC, GGEC, HW4P and Stop The War Coalition reaching out to groups that support Palestinian rights allows the opportunity to highlight attacks on health workers in Palestine, sharing the initiatives we are involved with and also to share the important work of SPHP



Gerry O'Hare and Abdulla Alhasso

## Film Screenings

In collaboration with the University of Glasgow “Thinking Culture” programme, the SPHP have co-hosted two film screenings.

### ***Gaza : Doctors Under Attack 17th July 2025***

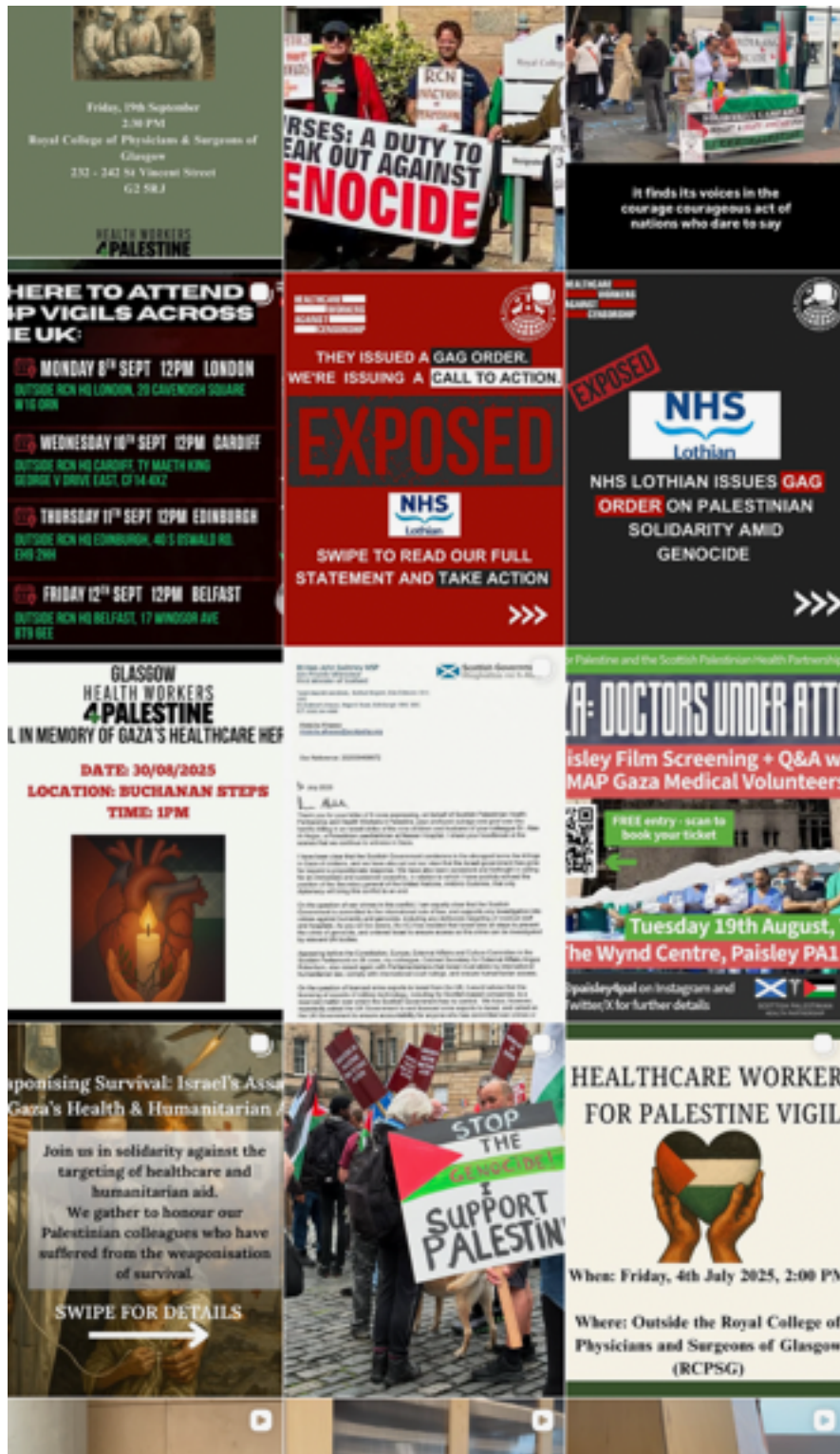
The first public screening of this C4 documentary (commissioned by the BBC but not shown). Producer of the film Ben De Pear (Basement Films) and Tas Quereshi (Gaza surgical volunteer) presented at the screening and participated in Q&A. The film was recently awarded a BAFTA.

### ***A State of Passion. 1st October 2025***

First Scottish screening of the documentary on the life and humanitarian work of Palestinian surgeon Ghassan Abu Sitta. This event was attended in person by Dr Ghassan Abu Sitta and Lebanese film maker Jamal Awad who were available for Q&A. The film was screened simultaneously at St Andrews and Edinburgh Universities who both participated via zoom for the Q&A. St Andrews and Edinburgh University advertised the screening as a SPHP event.

Both events were filled to capacity. These events highlighted to those attending the aims of the SPHP. Both events attracted new members to the SPHP and the collaboration with the University of Glasgow Thinking Culture enabled the capacity to reach out to other groups (including non-health workers).

From the SPHP Instagram Page (@sphp\_scotpalhp)



## MAP VISIT TO NABLUS AND HEBRON 2025.

A multidisciplinary breast cancer team, supported by Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), visited the West Bank in 2025. This comprised a breast care nurse, oncologist, oncoplastic breast surgeon and myself, a radiologist. This was primarily a scoping exercise for a further MAP funded breast unit in Hebron.

Although there is now a fully functional government/MAP funded breast unit at Rafida Hospital in Nablus, travelling constraints can make attendance for women challenging and therefore a unit in Hebron, further south in the West Bank, would alleviate this problem to some extent.

As a group, we considered two sites, one of which, in a newly built government hospital in Halhoul, was the obvious preference of the local medical professionals. We were able to contribute positively to the discussion to recommend the site and advise MAP on equipment and staffing requirements for the new unit, which is now going forward.



Janet Litherland (6<sup>th</sup> from left) with Hebron and MAP colleagues

It was lovely to revisit the unit in Nablus and to renew acquaintances with old friends. The medical professions at the Breast Unit continue to offer government funded care from their new breast unit under trying circumstances. There are still challenges, especially in staffing radiology and pathology services and our visit gave us an opportunity to highlight these

ongoing concerns. Unfortunately, funding is often not the only limitation in taking these issues forward and MAP continues to try and encourage the creation of more substantive posts by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.



**Janet Litherland**  
**SPHP Executive Group Member**

## **THE SURGICAL COURSES IN THE WEST BANK CONTINUE!**

A Surgical Training partnership continues between a group from the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (RCSEd), the well-respected Juzoor Foundation for Health and Social Development (a Palestinian NGO) and the surgical section of the PMC. This group has worked closely over the last 15 years with our friends the local surgical trainers, building training capacity and delivering courses in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. We were delighted that our team's visits could go ahead in February 2025 and February 2026.

The relationship was built first on the Basic Surgical Skills course, an important practical course for early-years trainees which was introduced by the group in 2011 and is now an obligatory part of the Palestinian Medical Council (PMC) surgical curriculum, with local faculty delivering it on multiple sites since 2015. These courses began when surgeons Robin and Magda Kincaid assembled a group of surgeons including David Sedgwick, Ruth McKee, Ian Wallace, John Anderson and a technician to provide the course in Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem.

During subsequent annual visits, a Train the Trainer course was added, local faculty took over leadership and now run the course independently twice annually, and the UK visitors now provide QA, fellowship and collaboration on future planning. The RCSEd office and Juzoor Foundation both provide support. Regular sites have included East Jerusalem,

Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron and Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza, where our colleagues have been so much on our hearts. Over 380 candidates have now successfully completed the course. In February 2026 David Sedgwick mentored a Train-the-Trainers course for a large new faculty group.



Fig 1: BSSC Course photograph in Juzoor Offices, Ramallah February 2026

At the courses in 2022, Ken Walker, who joined from 2017, introduced the concept of Non-Technical Skills for Surgeons (NOTSS), another RCSEd course covering the cognitive and social skills that underpin surgical performance. This was well received, full NOTSS courses were delivered in Ramallah in Feb 2025 and Feb 2026 by Ken, Magda Ionescu and Ahmad Nassef, and local faculty are being trained.

On this most recent of visits, the welcome and camaraderie was as warm as ever, the partnership felt more important than ever, and the feedback from the courses was really encouraging. Participants all said they would be making changes to their practice and that they would recommend the courses to colleagues.

The future plans are:-

- BSS to run 3 times annually. Ismaeel Manasraa our technician hopefully to visit RCSEd skills lab in Edinburgh.
- Continue building NOTSS course capacity.
- Introducing 2 other courses, by local request:
  1. A holistic “Surgical Residents Foundation Camp”. A working group is being led by Dr Omar Abdul Shafi, who has already visited the Scottish Surgical Boot Camps which run in the Highland Clinical Skills Centre in Inverness, and one or two other trainers will visit this autumn.
  2. An Essential Surgical Skills course for paramedics, A&E nurses & GPs.



Fig 2: BSS Faculty observing the candidates performing the skills

We are extremely grateful to Juzoor and the RCSEd for supporting our partnership, and especially to our ever-inspiring Palestinian colleagues.



Fig 3: NOTSS course for gynaecologists. There was another course for surgeons



Fig 4: Faculties of trainers for Palestinian BSSC and NOTSS February 2026

Ken Walker is an SPHP member and David Sedgwick is a SPHP Executive Group member. Magda Ionescu is a surgeon in Surrey and Ahmed Nassef is a Surgeon in Leeds



Fig 5: Planning meeting with Juzoor Foundation  
David Sedgwick is 3<sup>rd</sup> from the left

## DR KHALIL KALIDI

The following article is a summary of the presentation given by Dr Khalil Kalidi at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Symposium of the Palestinian Health Alliance on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2026

### **When Political Violence Breaks the Body: Amputations, Health, Survival, and Rehabilitation**

**Khalil Kalidi, Orthopedic Department, ALAqsa Hospital, Deir al-Balah, Gaza Strip, oPt**

Dr. Khalil Khaldi introduced the healthcare system in Gaza and the chain of referrals that an amputee went through prior to 7th October 2023. Steps included: (1) Transferring the injured to the nearest hospital for a life-saving surgery; (2) Referring the amputee to a tertiary care center for advanced surgical intervention and wound care; (3) Sending the patient to the rehabilitation and prosthetic service center; (4) Joining a community reintegration program (reintegration into society).

After October 7, this chain broke down due to the overwhelming number of injuries and the damages and loss of equipment and facilities incurred by the tertiary care centers. Record systems were lost and access to the rehabilitation centers became very difficult.

Consequently, the community reintegration program was cancelled.

In August 2024, the rehabilitation task force (RTF) was established; a coordinated body established by the WHO and other international and local organizations. The RTF's main tasks are to maintain records, report the number of amputees, estimate their future needs, establish referral hubs, ease accessibility to rehabilitation centres, establish a central referral system, and manage and direct donations from abroad.

The reopening of the pre-existing prosthesis centre in Gaza City was prioritized. A central committee and three regional (north, middle, south) prosthetic evaluation committees were formed. These committees coordinated with five main hospitals: Indonesian (north), Shifa Medical Complex (Gaza City), Al Aqsa (middle), Nasser Medical Complex (Khan Yunis), and European Gaza (south). Only one of the two prosthetic and care service centers still exist, the Artificial Limb and Polio Center (ALPC) in Gaza City.

Recently, branches opened; the Al Amal Physiotherapy Centre (south) and Hamad-Zawiyah shore (middle) were repurposed and renovated. However, the situation is dismal with limitations in materials, and long waiting lists of almost two years for the amputees. The revived stump revision program has to attend to an overwhelming number of patients. There is a total of around 7,000 amputees: 3,870 amputees since October 7, 2023, and 2,500 from before. The majority of amputees (78%) are men, age 18-40. Lower limb and above-knee amputations counted around 733; below-knee amputations 562.

These victims, however, are not mere statistics. Each has a story that involves their families and a long shared journey. Dr. Khalid shared the stories of three amputees: a 9-year-old boy, a 13-year-old girl, and a 35-year-old mother. The sudden loss of a limb transforms lives. Losing a limb equates losing mobility which is life-threatening in Gaza's circumstances.

Following the life-saving surgery at the nearest hospital, the injured are sent to a field hospital for wound care and further stabilization. As the wound heals, they are discharged to be on their own under extreme stressful circumstances (no housing, polluted environment, no access to outpatient clinics, no fuel and no transportation).

When they register their injury, they wait 4-8 weeks to hear back from an outpatient clinic. They have to register online on Sehati website for an appointment with a prosthetic evaluation committee within 2-5 weeks. Only then, they will benefit from the aid programs but there is no rehabilitation program to join for lack of capacity and resources.

Stump revision if needed was not available until October 2025. Only below-knee prostheses are available, although the majority of cases are above-knee. The society reintegration program is still frozen and amputees - some are the breadwinners for their families - are vulnerable with recurrent displacement, and no access to mental and financial support or housing. Their medical-health experiences are intertwined with complex social and mental challenges including family separation.

## **DR KHAMIS ELESSI**

The following two articles are repeated from SPHF Newsletter No 5 in 2022. After 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023 Khamis Elessi spent over 800 days in Gaza working every day in his hospitals and clinics, while also looking after his large family. In 2026 he was able to leave Gaza for Amman in Jordan, with seven members of his family, and is now resident in Oslo, Norway.

Khamis attended the 4<sup>th</sup> SPHP Conference in Glasgow in March 2026 and is returning to be a speaker in person at the 5<sup>th</sup> SPHP Conference on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2026. (Page 3)

It is a pleasure to welcome Khamis back to Scotland, as one of the heroes of Palestinian doctors in Gaza.

## 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. 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 below.

**Graham Watt**

## 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 that 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 25<sup>th</sup> -26<sup>th</sup> of October 2018, we organized the 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

## INTERNATIONAL LINKAGES

As well as the direct work of SPHP we seek to develop partnerships, share platforms and most of all hear the voices and offer support to Palestinian colleagues. A few highlights are shared below.

SPHP is now a full member of the Scottish International Development Alliance and this has opened up opportunities to be part of their programme and network on issues related to Palestine. Several members attended the SIDA conference (open to all SPHP members) and in March Prof Khamis Elessi and Mhoira Leng spoke about partnerships for delivering medical education in conflict during his first visit to Scotland since the genocide began....an emotional reunion with Scotland and all who were able to meet him. He met several Scottish MSPs hosted by Pauline Makaskill and has been invited to attend a bigger gathering at the Scottish Parliament later in the year.



Khamis Elessi and Pauline McNeil

SPHP was also represented at the RSE where planning for a combined Higher Education sector response for those affected by conflict and humanitarian disaster is being developed. In April, SPHP was part of a conference hosted by the Global Health Academy, University

of Edinburgh and CairdeasIPCT exploring resistance, coping and hope and included Prof Yasser Abu Jamei, head of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme.

We have several Palestinian healthcare colleagues studying in Scotland through different programmes and at different institutions. Many have joined SPHP and there was a very moving surprise reunion with their Professor at the last SPHP conference after working under bombings and genocide in Gaza City for so long and another sharing a photo from his training on Gaza (5 years ago) and again in Glasgow. All of them are extremely concerned for their families in Gaza and what will happen at the end of their Masters year. They are keen to hear of any opportunities for advancing their academic careers or clinical training.



Mhoira Leng and Khamis Elessi

One of our key partners is PalMedAcademy working closely with SPHP board member Bashir Oudeh. Through the GEM (Gaza Educate Medics) programme so much is being done to advance medical, dental and nursing education as well as direct clinical support and mentorship with several ways for SPHP members to be involved. ( A small faculty group including SPHP members are marking 300 medical student assignments as we write this newsletter) Their annual conference in London was very well attended and SPHP were represented as speakers and chairpersons (Mhoira Leng and Philippa Whitford). This year so many Gazans were in person or online and the focus included acute trauma but also the growing challenge of infectious disease, mental health and psychological trauma, non-communicable disease and the need for rehabilitation. The latter will of course be the focus

of our next SPHP conference. A live link to the Sumud flotilla was a special moment.  
<https://palmedacademy.com/>

I was able to visit East Jerusalem and West Bank last year and discuss ways to support our colleagues seeking to care for those with non-communicable disease and palliative care. As ever the incredible courage of our Palestinian colleagues working with limited resources, a collapsing economy and the impossibility of patients travel so limiting access to essential treatments. There are plans for training programmes including a new medical school at Birzeit and the concentration on improving localised care such as the new Doura Hospital built in Hebron by Hebronites. Only the day before our visit 2 young men were shot in the streets of Hebron and the attacks and displacement plus burgeoning checkpoints continue. In July will be the London premier of 'Life Support' which focuses on the testimony of UK doctors who have been on Gaza during the genocide. It is hoped this film will also be shown in Scotland later in the year.

**Mhoira Leng**  
**SPHP Executive Group Member**

## **SPHP EXECUTIVE GROUP 2026**

The following Lead Officers were appointed at the AGM held in November 2025

Convenor	Graham Watt, Emeritus Professor of General Practice
Membership Secretary	Graham Bryce, Retired Consultant Child Psychiatrist
Treasurer	Abdulla Alhasso, Consultant Oncologist
Communications	Gerry O'Hare, Senior Oncology Nurse
International	Mhoira Leng, International Consultant for Palliative Care
Non-aligned	Janet Litherland, Consultant Radiologist
Non-aligned	Uma Nada Rajah, Senior A&E Nurse

Subsequent to the AGM, the Executive Lead Officers co-opted the following members to the Executive which now has 11 members.

Hamish Mcleod,	Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Glasgow
Bashir Oudeh,	Retired GP and our contact with Palmed UK
David Sedgwick,	Retired General Surgeon, Fort William
Philippa Whitford,	Retired MP and Breast Cancer Surgeon

The group has a face to face Forward Look meeting in January each year and then meets about six times during the year via Zoom.

## GETTING IN TOUCH

To contact the SPHP, email [info@scotpalhp.org](mailto:info@scotpalhp.org) or use the contact form at [scotpalhp.org](http://scotpalhp.org).

## JOINING THE SPHP

To join the SPHP, please go to <https://scotpalhp.org/become-a-member/>

## DONATING TO THE SPHP

To donate to the SPHP, please go to <https://scotpalhp.org/5678-2/>

It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing  
because you can only do a little.

Do what you can

**Sydney Smith**

## SCOTTISH PALESTINIAN HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

