Palestinian Right—and Ways—of Return

Unseen U.S. Partner in Iran Negotiations

Gaza’s Paralysis of Lines

Fouzi El-Asmar (1937-2013)
Diabetes has become a pandemic disease, with the World Health Organization predicting that developing economies will sustain 80 percent of all new cases in the first quarter of this century.

In the occupied Palestinian territories, the prevalence of Diabetes Mellitus already stands at up to 15 percent of a population of more than 4 million. This is three times higher than in the West, and makes it one of the most prevalent non-communicable diseases in the area.

Diabetic retinopathy affects up to 80 percent of all patients who have had diabetes for 10 years or more. Following the first ophthalmic epidemiology study in the occupied Palestinian territories, carried out by St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group (SJEHG) in 2008, it was discovered that diabetic retinopathy was the third largest cause of blindness in the West Bank (8 percent of all cases) and the second largest cause of severe visual impairment (14 percent of cases) in the general population.

Due to the Israeli occupation, movement of goods—whether from overseas or from within the occupied Palestinian territories—is restricted to the extent that many items of nutritional value are unavailable or prohibitively expensive.

Because the restriction of movement on people also has a direct impact on access to education and information, dietary and fitness advice is difficult to disseminate. Furthermore, when problems do arise, Israel's separation wall, checkpoints, military zones and a complex permit system mean access to healthcare is so challenging that many blindness-inducing illnesses are often detected late and monitored poorly.

In partnership with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), and supported by the World Diabetes Foundation, Christian Blind Mission, The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Fred Hollows Foundation, St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group has launched a Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Program. This exciting development aims to reduce the rising levels of preventable eye disease in the occupied Palestinian territories.

This will be achieved by initiating a three-year screening, treatment and management program for diabetic retinopathy among diabetic patients in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, including the refugee population of the southern districts of the West Bank.

An estimated 33,000 patients will be examined during the three-year program. A further 7,000 registered diabetic patients from West Bank UNRWA refugee camps are being screened.

Cases of sight-threatening retinopathy will be referred for further examination and management by SJEHG retina specialists, while those with non-sight-threatening disease will be kept under periodic review.

To date 6,490 patients have been screened. Of the nearly 50 percent who have been found to have diabetic retinopathy, 44 percent have been referred to one of SJEHG's other services across the West Bank and Gaza for further treatment, such as avastin, vitrectomy, laser or phaco surgery.

Research has demonstrated that blindness causes poverty, and that reversing the effects of blindness can improve the socio-economic status not just of the individual, but of their entire family.

According to David A. Dahdal, Head of Development and Grants, "This is the first initiative of its kind in Palestine which mainly aims to limit the prevalence of blindness in the oPt. SJEHG early-detects and treats patients with diabetic retinopathy before they go blind, and therefore improves quality of life. This project was planned in line with the Global Initiative 'Vision 2020' for the elimination of avoidable blindness.”

St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group, which has been operating for

Diana Safieh is Individual Giving Manager for St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group in London.
A child is tested at the orthoptic department.

more than 130 years, aims to continue caring for those without the ability to pay, regardless of race, religion or ethnicity. More than 110,000 patients are treated annually, a third of whom are under the age of 18.

Between its hospitals in Jerusalem and Hebron, clinics in Gaza and Anabta, mobile outreach teams, diabetic screening program and specialist ophthalmic training for Palestinian doctors and nurses, SJEHG services cover the entire occupied Palestinian territories.

**Screening Program Success Story**

Bara’ Youssef Hashash is a 17-year-old girl from Balata Camp in Nablus. Her dreams seem pretty straightforward: she wants to live peacefully, study and get married. But Bara’ is deaf and dumb; her disabil-

Bara’ and her family are some of many Palestinians who are thankful to St. John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group for saving their sight by detecting preventable eye disease.

For more information please visit <www.stjohnyehospital.org> or e-mail Diana.Saieh@stjohnyehospital.org for information on U.S.-tax-deductible giving.