

Addressing emergency trauma care needs in the Gaza Strip

Shiza Aftab¹, Eesha Yaqoob¹, Shahzad Ali Khan¹ and Saad Javed¹

¹Violence, Injury Prevention and Disability Unit, Health Services Academy, Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination, Islamabad, Pakistan (Correspondence to Eesha Yaqoob: eesha@hsa.edu.pk; eeshayaqoob6688@gmail.com).

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Every hour lives are lost in Gaza due to untreated injuries and preventable fatalities. Gaza is among the poorest places in the world and its tens of thousands of people with disabilities and chronic illnesses are at an increasing risk due to the breakdown of vital health care services and a surge in the number of injured patients (1,2). Combat operations, explosive ordnances, instability, border closures, movement restrictions, infrastructure damage, and aerial bombardments exacerbate the situation (3).

Gaza Strip is home to 2.1 million people, most of whom are displaced (4). Being one of the world's most densely populated cities, its 65% under-25 population is left to endure unending violence without access to life-saving care (5). The emergency departments across Gaza's few partially functional hospitals are besieged with hundreds of patients, and critical procedures are performed with inadequate anaesthesia and improper sterilization.

Since October 2023, more than 22 500 people have suffered life-threatening injuries, with up to 17 550 cases of critical limb trauma reported, including more than 4050 amputations, spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, and major burns (6,7).

Gaza has witnessed a systematic collapse of its healthcare infrastructure with the closure of more than half of its 36 hospitals, despite a 173% surge in emergency department visits (8). The only rehabilitation centre has been rendered non-functional, leaving thousands without access to essential recovery services (9). With an estimated 75 000 tonnes of explosives dropped and over 42 million tonnes of wreckage left behind, over 26 000 children, more than 2% of Gaza's children population, have died, and over 10 000 people remain trapped beneath the rubble (10,11).

Hospitals and emergency units are compelled to function with unreliable electricity and in poor sanitary environments. Healthcare workers are struggling to deliver complex trauma care with extremely limited resources, resulting in preventable complications and inevitable deaths (12). The most vulnerable, especially women and children, bear the burden of these catastrophe

with life-threatening consequences every day. The humanitarian crisis has reached catastrophic levels, with medical facilities operating under unimaginable conditions. The central blood bank at Al-Shifa Hospital was abandoned after 350 days of continuous shelling, leaving hospitals unable to meet the urgent need for blood.

Health workers continue to face serious challenges, with essential supplies running out, making them unable to treat the increasing number of patients suffering from life-threatening injuries (13). Neurosurgery, an essential procedure for patients with severe head injuries, has become scarce and available to only a few patients. Complicated procedures such as craniotomies have become impossible to perform, leaving patients with little hope for recovery. The lack of blood products has led to the postponement of essential surgeries, thus driving mortality rates higher. People with open wounds and fractures are at high risk of infection and amputation.

The current situation in Gaza requires urgent interventions to restore the broken health system (14), including the establishment of protected corridors that will allow the deployment of additional emergency medical teams, supply of critical equipment and medical consumables and the dispatch of mobile trauma units to locations where there is no access to hospital or clinical services. The responsibility lies in the lead organizations like WHO, UNRWA, UNICEF, UNFPA, the G4 Alliance, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, etc. to coordinate resource mobilization and distribution efforts that will revive the health facilities and establish secure supply chains. Well-coordinated trauma response networks, including mobile emergency care units, secure medical supply chains, telemedicine support systems, and international rehabilitation programmes are needed to cater to the needs of trauma patients. We cannot afford to wait, the time for action is now.

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