Insights from the nearest Israeli hospital to the Gaza Strip

As the Hamas–Israel war concludes its first week, physicians, nurses, administrative staff, and others have shown immense commitment to caring for more than 700 people seriously wounded in the war, far surpassing BUMCA’s normal capacity of 660 beds. As of Oct 14, 2023, 25% of the total emergencies were due to the Hamas–Israel war, a scale unprecedented in BUMCA’s history. BUMCA was built in 1961 and was physically reinforced against rockets in 2014, to enable the provision of safe, continuous medical treatment for people in Israel. Due to the history of bombings in the region, BUMCA constantly runs practice drills of mass casualty events to prepare for and function effectively during these situations.

From Oct 7 to Oct 14, 2023, despite shortages of specialised trauma resources and staff (such as neurosurgery and vascular specialists), innovative triage measures (such as opening every available bed and having suitably trained non-medical volunteers) have ensured that patient who are critical and unstable receive immediate intervention. Operating rooms have been in continuous use and the wounded are being welcomed and treated despite direct rocket attacks on BUMCA, including on the paediatric facilities, such as the Child Development Institute. By innovation and cooperation with other Israeli hospitals, BUMCA has doubled the capacity of its emergency room to help triage and stabilise the extensive volume of patients requiring immediate care from the surrounding residential zones that are under heavy bombardment.

For staff from the local community, the conflict has combined deep loss with their professional responsibilities. Yet, medical staff have continued working for prolonged periods, enduring harrowing shifts with remarkable resilience and compassion for civilian victims, including those from neighbouring Israeli communities and Israel Defense Forces’ soldiers. The psychiatric burden will undoubtedly linger.

BUMCA’s story emphasises that even medium-sized, level 1 trauma hospitals can rise above expectations through dedication, teamwork, resourcefulness, and constant practising when crisis demands it most. Despite more than 250 rockets shot by Hamas being launched at Ashkelon in the past 7 days, some hitting BUMCA itself, health workers have maintained constant functioning of the facility, including establishing a coordinated ambulance rapid response network and leveraging military-grade vehicles to ferry high acuity cases through the risky journey to reach care.

Looking ahead, Israel and other countries should build on BUMCA’s operational strategy for future hospital resilience planning.

We declare no competing interests.

Editorial note: The Lancet Group takes a neutral position with respect to territorial claims in published text and institutional affiliations.

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