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Checkpoints and blood drives: East Jerusalem hospitals cope with clashes

The director of one of East Jerusalem's busiest hospitals explains the unique challenges in treating demonstrators under occupation. 'I don't know what will happen, or when it will happen, but there will be trouble.'

By Corey Sherman



Palestinian medics evacuate a Palestinian protester during a protest following the suspected kidnapping and murder of a Palestinian teenager, East Jerusalem, July 2, 2014. (Yotam Ronen/Activestills.org)

As [violent clashes](#) between Israeli security forces and Palestinians in Shuafat surrounding the [murder of Muhammad Abu Khadr](#) began to let up early Thursday morning, the clashes were creating another serious problem just down the road: one East Jerusalem's busiest hospitals was facing an empty blood bank.

Makassed Islamic Charitable Hospital in at-Tur received 42 patients from Shuafat on Wednesday. When clashes take place in East Jerusalem, Red Crescent paramedics must decide whether to send their

patients to West or East Jerusalem hospitals. Those suffering tear gas inhalation are treated on the scene; more serious injuries are brought to Hadassah Ein Karem for emergency surgery; everything else is sent to Makassed, or the nearby Saint Joseph Hospital in Sheikh Jarrah.

During yesterday's bind, faced with a dire blood shortage due to the influx of injured demonstrators, one hospital employee turned to a friend of his – a Palestinian studying at the Hebrew University. At 2 a.m. on Thursday the student posted a note in a Facebook group of other Arab students studying in Jerusalem that the hospital needed to fill its blood bank. An hour later Makassed's hallways were filled with volunteers to donate blood.

The Facebook group isn't political, one student told me, but rather a forum for organizing social outings. After the message was posted, throngs of students walked from Hebrew University's campus in nearby French Hill to the hospital. Others shuttled back and forth in cars, picking up students in a loop. As of Thursday afternoon, the hospital's blood bank was overstocked.

"There's really nothing to say about how it happened," the student, who requested anonymity out of security concerns, explained to me. "The hospital employee knew one of us and so he called. About 30 students showed up to give blood, and five medical and nursing students helped the staff." As far as what these students plan to do in the coming days as events continue to unfold, he offered a simple explanation: "we are just waiting to help, that's it."

But Makassed faces longer-term issues that might be messy to untangle – especially if the violence continues. Dr. Rafiq Hussein, the first non-medical doctor to direct Makassed, is charged with turning around the hospital's administrative and financial systems and, as he said, help the hospital survive. Other problems are unique to the Israeli occupation. The political situation here makes it difficult for him to staff up. Employees have to gain Israeli work permits and navigate checkpoints just to make it to the hospital. Moreover, patients cannot often afford their treatment, and those who arrive with their families from Gaza or the West Bank have to be housed and fed by the hospital. Hussein himself receives no salary.

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Hussein doesn't believe that there is a deliberate effort to start a new intifada, but he warns that trouble could be just around the corner.

"On the first day of the [Second] Intifada in 2001, the Israeli authorities killed eight Palestinians. The injuries we treated yesterday were minor. This makes me think that the army doesn't want to escalate," Hussein explained Thursday afternoon. "Another intifada is not politically, economically, or militarily viable for the Israelis."

But coming days will test both Hussein and Makassed. Today is the first Friday of Ramadan, which concerns Hussein: "I don't know what will happen, or when it will happen, but there will be trouble." [Local news](#) agencies are now reporting that Abu Khadir's body will be returned to Shuafat from the Abu Kabir Forensic Institute in Tel Aviv today and the funeral procession will begin after afternoon prayers.



Palestinian youths clash with Israeli forces during a protest following the suspected kidnapping and murder of a Palestinian teenager, East Jerusalem, July 2, 2014. A total of four journalists and dozens of protesters were injured in the clashes. (Oren Ziv/Activestills.org)

Another nettlesome problem lies between the Palestinian Red Crescent and Magen David Adom. There is little coordination between the two during the kinds of clashes seen yesterday. Makassed, which employs between 40 and 50 resident doctors, is the Red Crescent's hospital of choice due to its size and the professionalism of its staff, which, Issa Imam, a dispatcher at the Red Crescent says, is well coordinated.

All of Makassed's resident doctors are on call, an abnormality for this cash-strapped hospital. Imam voiced a sense of optimism. "We're always ready—for clashes, for traffic accidents. This is our job. It's normal."

The author is a journalist and student. Follow him on Twitter at [@shermancoreya](#) and on Instagram at [@cs_herman](#). Bilha Calderon contributed reporting to this story.

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