

the Outpatient Department last year. The constant upgrading and updating of the hospital keeps it in line with those in other cities. The operating theatre welcomes surgeons from around the world and they are usually impressed by the high standard of equipment and facilities available to perform the most complicated and specialised eye operations. Doctors and nurses are trained to a high standard in an academic environment conducive to modern teaching and learning methods, some of this in collaboration with the Israeli Haddassah Medical Centre. The School of Nursing has a high standard and training is linked with Thames Valley University. The nurses trained in Jerusalem are widely respected for their skills. The medical staff consists mainly of Palestinian doctors in junior positions whilst usually expatriate staff fill the more senior posts. The hospital needs visiting ophthalmologists for either the short or long term, as they prove invaluable in furthering the high level of expertise the hospital can offer, whilst also enhancing the level of postgraduate training. Many of these surgeons appreciate the high standards and friendly, dedicated commitment of the permanent staff and return to work in the hospital time and time again.

Since the days of the Crusades the hospital has always been there to promote the works of humanity and charity for the relief of persons in distress, suffering and danger without distinction of race, class or creed.



Today the hospital cares chiefly for the Palestinian population; 3.25 million of them live in East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank. The need is great, as the incidence of blindness amongst these people is 17 per thousand of the population, compared with about 1.5 per thousand in Israel, a figure similar to the UK and USA. There is also a high incidence of diabetes and hypertension amongst the Palestinians, more than half of whom are under the age of 18 years and 25% of the patients attending the outpatient clinics are under 12 years of age. The hospital has a specialised Paediatric Department, which treats children suffering from serious and blinding diseases. A weekly contact lens clinic is held, when children and babies are fitted if visually beneficial and domestically suitable. Trauma, either through intifada injury or domestic accidents is frequent. During recent years the hospital has dealt with trauma cases as a result of bullet injuries and fragments of bomb explosions that lead to loss of eyes. During 2000 nearly 45,000 outpatients were treated, the number dropped to around 32,000 in 2001 and 2002 (mainly due to the political situation causing difficulties in local travel) but the figure rose to 42,000 in 2003. Major surgery at the hospital is in the region of 2000 operations each year.

The ever-increasing difficulties experienced by the Palestinians in travelling to and from Jerusalem resulted in the hospital setting up an Outreach programme for those living in villages and refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza. A mobile vehicle with medical and nursing staff visits some of the more inaccessible parts; if this were not the case these Palestinians would have no specialised eye care. During 2003 almost 6000 persons were seen and treated on the Outreach programme and this is likely to increase if Israel continues with the building of the wall in the West Bank. Difficulties in travel not only affect the