

Border Treatment of both Body and Soul

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For the last few years, since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria [1], the vast majority of Syrian children have been deprived of the conditions necessary for a normal and healthy development – physically and emotionally. As a result of the conflict, many of them have lost family members, most cannot remember what a classroom looks like, and instead of playing soccer and building with Lego they turn to whatever they can find to amuse or distract themselves, sometimes with catastrophic consequences. We describe such a case here.

PATIENT DESCRIPTION

This is the story of a 12 year old Syrian shepherd who noticed a shiny object in a field and he picked it up. Tragically, this object was an unexploded bomb, and after a few seconds it exploded severely injuring the boy. The palm of his right hand was destroyed, he lost consciousness, and his eyes and body were punctured by ricochets. Some local people found him and brought him to the border with Israel, where Israeli soldiers administered first aid and sent him with military paramedics to the Ziv Medical Center in Safed, the nearest town. The child arrived alone as his family remained in Syria in order to take care of the other children.

Upon arrival he underwent orthopedic surgery (amputation of his wrist and hand); after head computed tomography (CT) he was transferred to the ophthalmology department due to blindness.

In addition to the severe physical injuries, the boy exhibited symptoms of post-trauma and urgently needed psychosocial assessment with social workers and the psychological team. An Arab social worker served as the child's support and due to the language barrier was his only bridge with the hospital staff.

The boy could not accept the devastating news that he was blind, asking repeatedly when he will get treatment to restore

his sight. When after 2 weeks he understood the reality of his new condition, he manifested symptoms of mental distress and stopped communicating with the staff for 2 days, stopped eating and drinking and did not leave the room.

His medical rehabilitation focused on learning how to walk with a cane. The rehabilitation counselor taught him how to walk inside a room, how to find a place to sit, and how to avoid obstacles in his path. On the second day he learned to find the bathroom, and on the third day how to take a shower. On the fourth day he went outside to learn how to walk among people. Slowly, he started to develop new skills and to adjust to his new condition. Since the date of his discharge was approaching, the staff had to begin preparing him for leaving the Center. During his hospitalization the staff dealt with every aspect of his care: they fed him, bathed him, gave him affection. However, he was returning to a place with drastically limited options. He asked for \$100, a large sum of money for a Syrian child but which would help him embark on a new beginning in his war-ravaged country. The staff at Ziv Medical Center decided to respond to the child's request and soon found a donor, the father of another boy hospitalized in our center.

DISCUSSION

This case demonstrates the complexity of the humanitarian aid given to Syrian patients at our center. The mission of Ziv Medical Center, like that of other hospitals, is to save lives and provide the required medical services. Had this child been Israeli, he would have been discharged and the hospital would not have provided him with further treatment or rehabilitation for his orthopedic and ophthalmic disabilities, or with money. These issues are handled by other systems such as health funds and the municipality's social services. However, we realized that the Syrian patients have no recourse other than our staff. The government decision to provide medical support to the Syrian people is exercised exclusively by the health services even though they might fall beyond the health system's responsibility. Our staff provides help to Syrian civilians from areas outside of our catchment and more extensive help than Israeli patients would receive.

ISRAEL'S HUMANITARIAN AID TO WOUNDED SYRIAN CIVILIANS

This case demonstrates the uniqueness, as well as the burden, of this humanitarian project that demands that the staff at Ziv Medical Center not only save lives and provide medical services, as we do for Israeli patients, but extend support in other ways to ensure that these people can return to their country with a greater chance of survival.

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References

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