

..... Overseas Partner Fact Sheet.....

St John Eye Hospital

How it all started

The St John Eye Hospital traces its origins and inspiration from the first Order of St John, founded 900 years ago in Jerusalem. The hospital originally opened in 1882: the first eye hospital in the Middle East. During the war of 1948, the hospital building was so severely damaged that a fresh start had to be made. With worldwide support and acclaim, the present St John Eye Hospital was opened in 1960, in East Jerusalem.

Whilst the hospital is open to anyone, regardless of their race, religion or ability to pay, the majority of its patients come from the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, where the hospital is the sole provider of quality ophthalmic care and professional training.

A study of blindness in the Palestinian territory published in 2010 estimated that of the 20,000-plus cases of blindness or severe visual impairment in the region, 80% was avoidable. The hospital provides both preventative and curative care, restoring sight where possible and maintaining vision in those whose eyes are already damaged.



The hospital celebrated 50 years at its premises in Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem, in 2010



Key facts

Founded: 1882

Location: Jerusalem

First BibleLands' grant: 1988

BibleLands' Grant: £5,820 per annum

Current Activities

The main hospital has 49 beds and offers a full range of ophthalmic services. There is a large, modern Outpatients Department and very busy specialist Retinal, Corneal and Paediatric services. The well-equipped operating theatre provides a 24-hour emergency service, where all kinds of major eye surgery are performed. There is also a research unit, investigating eye diseases such as trachoma, a major cause of blindness.

Each year, 40,000 patients are treated at the main hospital, and about 2,500 operations are performed, including many cataract operations. Patients are charged nominal fees and treatment is entirely free for the poor and the young. Since many patients are refugees or are unemployed, and almost one third of the population is under the age of 10, less than 30% of the hospital's income comes from patients' fees.

Whilst the hospital is committed to employing and training local doctors, the restrictions on employment and general movement of staff and patients means that a number of volunteer doctors from around the world help to care for the patients, as well as teaching and training local doctors.



Static Clinics: The Gaza Strip is one of the most troubled and disadvantaged areas in the world. The hospital opened a satellite clinic here in 1992, to provide the local population with better access to its services. This clinic is now the major ophthalmic facility for the local population. Since over 40% of the population is under the age of 14, children make up a significant proportion of the caseload.

Following the success of the Gaza clinic, and due to increasing travel restrictions in the West Bank, static clinics were set up in Hebron in 2005 and Anabta, in the north of the West Bank, in 2007. These clinics have allowed the hospital to extend its services to most of the West Bank. Like the Gaza clinic, they provide outpatient services and simple surgery for people who cannot access the main hospital in Jerusalem. The centres also refer more complex cases to the main hospital in Jerusalem.

These three clinics have proved very necessary, treating more than 40,000 patients each year between them.

Mobile Outreach Programme: The separation barrier has made travel to Jerusalem, and thus the hospital, expensive and difficult. It is particularly hard for younger or older patients. There is therefore an even greater need for the Mobile Outreach Clinics, which first began in 1982. They have become a well-known sight in the remote towns, villages and refugee camps of the West Bank, providing primary ophthalmic care to those who cannot get to the hospital.

Two teams of doctors and nurses set off at 7:30 every morning, returning after dark. They are often held up at checkpoints or even not allowed to enter some villages, where patients are waiting expectantly for their arrival. But their motto, 'we will get through,' usually means that they find a way around the obstacles they face.

Each year, around 8,000 people, of whom over one third are under the age of ten, are treated by these teams.



Left: Lina and her siblings all suffer from congenital cataracts. They came to the St John Hospital as babies and throughout their lives have received treatment and glasses from the hospital, free of charge. Here, Rawan reads, with the help of a special magnifying CCTV bought with a BibleLands' grant.

Training the local population is an important part of the hospital's work, as lack of awareness about issues such as diabetes and cataracts is a major part of the problem. The hospital also offers a four-year Medical Residency Training Programme, a Joint Teaching Programme with the world-renowned Hadassah Medical Centre in West Jerusalem and a Specialist Ophthalmic Nursing Course at Jerusalem Hospital.

Often children at other BibleLands' Partners, such as the Helen Keller Centre, are treated at the St John Eye Hospital. The hospital is far more than a centre of healing; it is a place where compassion, understanding and co-operation are fostered among all peoples: it truly is a place of goodwill.

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