**TESTIMONIES FROM SHEIKH ZAYED HOSPITAL, SANA’A – MSF**

**10 July 2020**

**DR ABDULRAHMAN, MEDICAL DOCTOR**

“I was working as a medical doctor in the intensive care unit (ICU), but because of the shortages of medical staff at the moment – a real problem, both in this hospital and countrywide – I’ve started working and supporting colleagues in the inpatient department as well.

As a doctor working in a COVID-19 treatment centre, certainly I’m concerned about possible infection, especially with all the news about health workers contracting the virus. But I’m a doctor; it’s impossible for me to stay home. It’s my duty to come to this hospital every day and provide a meaningful service to people while I can. Contracting the disease could happen anywhere, inside or outside the hospital. What we can do is protect ourselves by following health guidelines and taking preventive measures.

We’ve noticed more patients with moderate symptoms arriving at the hospital, but our bed capacity has still not reached its maximum. In our ICU, we see patients arriving very late and needing to be put on oxygen straight away. We see patients over the age of 60 and others with diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and heart problems. They require greater attention and constant observation.

Oxygen consumption is very high. Patients in a critical condition in the ICU can consume up to 10 bottles of oxygen a day. As soon as they’re empty, these oxygen bottles have to be replaced quickly. Sometimes, with patients in a critical condition, the bottles have to be replaced every 2.5 hours, so your eyes have to be on the patient, the monitor and the oxygen meter at all times.”

**MUTHANNA, INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL SUPERVISOR FOR COVID-19**

“I’ve been working with MSF since late-2017 as a nurse supervisor and started in Sheikh Zayed hospital in early March 2020. My job supervising infection prevention and control involves observing and reminding the staff on a daily basis about the proper use of personal protective equipment and good handwashing practice, as well as waste disposal and the disposal of used sheets.

At the beginning I felt afraid. I was scared because of the escalation of the pandemic and the exaggerations in the media of the number of cases worldwide. But when I started reading more about the virus to understand it better, I realised that it’s just like any other disease and shouldn’t be treated with such horror. I attended many online courses about the virus and the latest medical protocols, so I became more aware of the precautionary measures that people should take to protect themselves.

I advise people in the community to follow the rules to stem the spread of the virus by washing hands with soap and water, by observing physical distancing, by not greeting people with handshakes and by avoiding crowded places and gatherings. I also advise them to see a doctor and go to a health facility at an early stage of the disease. Some people are circulating false information and baseless rumours through social media. Health staff are working at maximum capacity, for 12 hours at a time, to provide the best possible medical services and to treat patients and help them recover from the disease.

In the wards of this hospital, we see patients who are terrified, for their loved ones and for themselves. I saw one patient who had asked a nurse to sit with him and help him write his will in case something bad happened to him. Sometimes people are their own worst enemy, causing themselves harm with negative thoughts when instead they should stay optimistic, strong and determined and keep in their minds that they can overcome this disease and recover.”

**MOHAMMED, NURSE**

“I started working here in June. I worked in nursing before and I also worked with MSF in the emergency response to cholera in Taiz Houban last year.

Naturally, there have been moments where I’ve felt afraid of working in this place, but I remind myself of the old days, a year ago during the cholera response, when there was even greater fear, as people were unfamiliar with cholera and its symptoms. This hospital has the equipment we need for our protection and the preventive measures to keep staff and patients safe, so I feel secure working here.

Many of the patients we see here arrive at the emergency room in the late stages of the disease. Many are elderly and in a serious condition. Some arrive late because they were referred multiple times from different hospitals before arriving here.

We are also seeing more and more patients improving and being moved from intensive care to normal beds, and this gives us hope and motivation.

We monitor the patients at all times and provide the medication they need, such as paracetamol and antibiotics. We also help patients by providing them with physiotherapy, as they are immobile, and we try our best to keep their oxygen saturation higher than 90 to prevent them from suffering respiratory distress.

Patients [with mild symptoms] are discharged and advised to self-isolate and monitor themselves to ensure they and their loved ones remain safe, especially those with elderly relatives at home or with relatives with underlying health conditions.

We are constantly educating patients about the importance of handwashing and physical distancing as effective preventive measures. But, most importantly, we tell discharged patients that if they experience similar symptoms again – such as a dry cough, a fever and breathing difficulties – to come straight to the hospital and not to wait.”

**NAWFAL, LOGISTICIAN**

“Our role is to complement the work of the medical staff and make sure that there is an appropriate working environment for medical and non-medical staff to carry out their challenging duties.

I have several tasks, including supervising the loading, transporting and unloading of supplies from the MSF base to Sheikh Zayed hospital. I’m also in charge of keeping the project supplied with protective equipment, and most importantly, with oxygen.

There is a lot of pressure on oxygen suppliers from all the hospitals which need this lifesaving substance. We are surrounded by the fear that we might run out of oxygen because the consumption rate is very high. There are limited oxygen cylinders and also a noticeable delay in supplying much-needed oxygen to the hospital. There is always that time of the day, nearing dusk, when we see that our reserve quantity is coming to an end and the tension starts to rise.

My main concern when I come to work is securing oxygen. Do we have enough today for the patients whose lives depend on it? It is a daily concern, making sure that there is a sufficient quantity of oxygen and oxygen flow meters available for the bottles we have. It can be a nerve-wracking job, but it’s very rewarding when you can help provide people with a good service.”

**KHAIRIYA, 75-year-old female patient, from Sana’a**

“At first I was having headaches and I felt dizzy. I lost my balance and fell over. That’s when my son brought me to Sheikh Zayed hospital. I was taken immediately to the intensive care unit, where I stayed for about three days.

Back then I simply wished to be able to talk to the doctors and nurses around me. I had headaches that stopped me from sleeping at night. Initially I was coughing a lot and I had a fever and a sore throat, but then the cough subsided. Three days later, the doctors started to notice an improvement and so I was moved to the normal inpatient ward.

I’ve been in this hospital for 10 days now, and every hour medical staff come to my bed to check on me. My son visits me every day but stays far away – he waits outside to receive updates on my condition. One of the hospital staff – they’re called ‘communicators’ – delivers my messages to him and his messages back to me.

I can’t wait to leave this room. I’m very homesick. I wish I could leave early in the morning tomorrow. I’m so looking forward to being with my family again.”

***UPDATE:*** *Khairiya has been discharged from hospital and is now back with her family.*

**NABIL, 40-year-old male patient, from Sana’a**

“I was at home when my symptoms started to show: I was having trouble breathing and I had a stubborn fever. I was afraid at the time that the symptoms could be related to COVID-19. I was moved between three different hospitals before arriving at Sheikh Zayed hospital. One of the three hospitals was private and I couldn’t afford the treatment there.

It was a bit difficult being in this room, away from my family, as no visits were allowed. Only one caretaker – my brother – was allowed to visit, and even then very occasionally. But I was in contact with my family on the phone.

I’ve been in this hospital for 19 days and I’m told I’ll be discharged tomorrow. Doctors and nurses have been checking on me around the clock. When I was first admitted I was in constant need of oxygen, it was even difficult to walk. I lost my sense of smell and taste and I couldn’teat normally. But for the past couple of days, my health has really improved, thanks be to God. I don’t have a fever or difficulties breathing – all my symptoms are gone. I’m walking, I’m doing physical training and I’m eating and drinking well.

Once I leave this hospital, I plan to raise awareness in my community about coming early to hospital. As soon as people start experiencing symptoms of the virus, they should go to hospital before it’s too late. There are rumours going round society at the moment, but they are false – they’re nothing but lies – and the evidence for it is that here I am, in Sheikh Zayed hospital, and I’ve recovered.”

***UPDATE:*** *Nabil has been discharged from hospital and is now back with his family.*

ENDS