

“We’re trying to create a service similar to one the people are used to” - Clinics for evacuees from the Gaza envelope are trying to provide an anchor in times of crisis

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Three Clalit clinics including medical specialists and a pharmacy were established in the Dead Sea hotels | Dr. Assi Sikoral talks about the struggles, from transporting medicines, treating injuries from a Hamas attack to emotional support | In Shafyim, a clinic was established within a day for the people of Kfar Gaza, and there is also good news: "We have established a group for pregnant women".



Photo 1: The team working in the Shfayim clinic, serving the residents of Kibbutz Kfar Aza (Photo: Daphna Eizbruch)

In the Dead Sea hotels complex, clinics have been opened by all the public health services and have been operating for the past two weeks, providing medical care to the twelve thousand residents of the communities surrounding Gaza who were evacuated to the complex. Clalit Health Services, which insures half of the settlements in the South, has established a central clinic there that includes specialist medicine, along with three satellite clinics spread out in the hotel area, and an active pharmacy. While the residents are dealing with severe trauma experiences and disruption of their entire lives, the teams of the clinics in the Dead Sea and other evacuation sites are trying to provide them with an anchor of support and stability.

The evacuation of the residents to the Dead Sea began on the first of October 8, the day after the murderous attack by Hamas. On Monday morning, Dr. Assi Sikorel, a family doctor at Clalit’s Ramat HaNegev clinic, opened the first emergency clinic, together with Clalit employees from Ramat HaNegev and the Arava. Within a day, a computer network and full clinic equipment were in place, aiding about 100 people a day.

"A large part of the work is to help people understand how to obtain medications they left at home, and to deal with the transportation of medications" says Dr. Sikoral, "besides that, we treat acute problems like any clinic, such as ear infections or blood pressure. We also treat injuries that occurred during the events themselves. And of course, emotional treatment."

In his eyes, the medical and emotional aspects are inseparable. "As family doctors, we deal with personal crises on a daily basis. Even in regular times, if a patient comes in with chest pain, I have to find out if it is a cardiac problem, an anxiety attack, or another problem. I don't believe in separating body and mind, it's the same person, and many times the problems are related."

Dr. Sikoral sees running the clinic as a necessary component in creating a sense of routine and stability. "Available health services should feel like running water or electricity," he says, "even on normal days, medical services are an anchor, and the clinic is the first place people turn to when they are having a hard time. This is even more true for people who have lost all of their community support systems."