



# AUGUSTA VICTORIA HOSPITAL SUB-ACUTE CARE PROJECT

In 2008, Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR), working in partnership with the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH), East Jerusalem, obtained a \$610,000 grant from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to refurbish and expand sub-acute care facilities at the hospital. The project was a response to the region's growing senior population as well as the large number of Palestinian households (47 percent) with a member suffering from a chronic illness or disability.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project has been completed and opened its doors for service on April 28, 2009, with 25 beds, nearly double what previously existed. Already it has 100 percent occupancy and a waiting list. Now called the Skilled Nursing and Long-term Care Center, it is staffed by a geriatrician, 12 nurses and two physiotherapists, and provides 24-hour medical care to individuals with chronic health problems that include stroke, cancer, heart disease, head trauma, and complications of diabetes and Parkinson's disease. Patients in the unit range from 65 to 90 years of age, and the average length of stay is 184 days. Most patients need twenty-four-hour care and are supported on feeding tubes. Many need regular dialysis treatment.



*Mrs. Nejem Alden Nejem says her husband, who receives dialysis three times a week, is well cared for at AVH. "I wouldn't be able to care for him at home. Our house has stairs and there are no strong sons to help." Photo: E. Peters*

The expanded unit has been a blessing for Palestinian women who often bear the brunt of caring for an elderly family member. Such a role often becomes overwhelming when added to the responsibilities of maintaining a home, caring for other family members and maintaining gainful employment to help with financial support. The psycho-social impact on the Palestinian woman in terms of

accessing geriatric care facilities for elderly family members cannot be overestimated.

Interviews with family members of patients in the Center indicate a high level of satisfaction. The unit is bright, clean and cheerful, and there are continuous supportive, friendly interactions between family members and staff. Ibrahim Abdul Karim, whose brother is a long-time patient



says, “We are like one big family.” They love having staff that can speak to them in their own language. Rana Abdullah, whose 80-year old husband, Emile, has been there for about eight months, says “I just wouldn’t be able to afford the equipment and nursing care Emile needs at home, and AVH is wonderful in allowing 24-hour visiting for family.” This 24-hour visiting policy means family members from the West Bank do not always have to make the tedious trip through the checkpoints to visit their loved ones. Jamil Awad, has been in the unit for several years. His daughter, Ronda, says that “the unit is wonderfully clean and my mother just wasn’t able to care for Dad, who is now 79, at home by herself anymore”.

The Long-term Care Center at AVH is a well-planned, well-run unit that is meeting an urgent need. It is hard to imagine a more successful way for Canadians to support international humanitarian efforts. The project has been a beacon of what Canadian money can do to help spread the diplomacy of good deeds in a politically torn region of the world. At the entrance to the refurbished and expanded unit is a dedication to the Government and People in Canada.

#### ABOUT AVH

Augusta Victoria Hospital was built in 1910 by Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and is named after the Kaiser’s wife, Empress Augusta Victoria. Built of cream-coloured local stone, it has an elegant paved



*Augusta Victoria Hospital is located on the historic Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. Photo: D. Harris*

courtyard in its center, complete with mature date palms almost as tall as the hospital itself. It stands on the highest point of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives, and the spire of the old German church attached to the hospital can be seen from as far away as Amman, Jordan.

In 1950, administration of the hospital was transferred to the Lutheran World Federation from the Red Cross. The hospital, the second largest in East Jerusalem, is a modern tertiary care facility, open to people of all religions. It serves the most disadvantaged patients from Gaza and the West Bank, and has a special historical

relationship with the UN refugee relief services. In 1997, AVH was reengineered to provide specialties otherwise unavailable. It promotes sustainability, medical excellence, professional and interfaith relations as main components to building a modern functional civil society. Its staff, both Christian and Muslim, are frequently trained in Israeli hospitals, and the hospital is a partner in a large international network of hospitals that develop the capacities of the local staff. The hospital serves patients from East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. Approximately 20% of them are refugees.