



The first cohort of nurses from the program

## Oncology and Palliative Care Program

According to the latest Palestinian Ministry of Health report, the total number of newly reported cancer cases in 2016 in Palestine was 2,536. This represents an increase of 5.7% from the 2,400 reported cases in 2015, and the incidence rate of cancer in Palestine is currently 86.4 new cases per 100,000 Palestinians. Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Palestine.

The local community's obvious need for quality healthcare for cancer patients is what prompted Bethlehem University to develop its High Diploma program in Oncology and Palliative Care. The program, which accepted its first cohort of students in 2016, addresses the shortage of nurses specializing in Oncology and Palliative Care in Palestine. Additionally, as there are currently no professional palliative care services in Palestine, Bethlehem University graduates will fill this crucial role for late-stage and terminal cancer patients who are in need of palliative care.

Mariam Awad, Dean of the Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences, and Gerry O'Hare, Oncology Nurse Specialist from Glasgow and member of the Clyde Health Board, developed their curriculum using the European Oncology Nursing (EONS) curriculum, and the program was designed with the support of Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP). Bethlehem University and MAP provide scholarships to several Oncology and Palliative Care students every year to encourage exceptional students to study for the diploma, and the Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences is currently working to convert the High Diploma into a master's degree.

The program aims to enhance Palestine's skilled nursing workforce and to ensure that Palestinian nurses are provided with the specific skill set needed to care for cancer patients, but it faces two challenges: offering a cutting-edge curriculum so that working nurses can continue to develop their knowledge after receiving their bachelor's degree, and ensuring long-term program sustainability. Because there are no local professionals who can teach the modules, securing funding for instructors to travel to Palestine and stay in Bethlehem for a semester is an imperative need. Currently, all of the Bethlehem University's Oncology and Palliative Care professors are guest lecturers who come from the United Kingdom. Eventually, Bethlehem University graduates will possess the professional experience and knowledge to teach future generations of Palestinian nurses.

To ensure the sustainability of the program, the University signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Palestinian Ministry of Health to send 12 to 15 nurses to study for the diploma annually. The University is also exploring the possibility of future cooperation with the King Hussein Cancer Center in Jordan in order to provide students with internship placements and crucial on-the-job training opportunities. This year marks the graduation of the first cohort of nurses from the program. The Glasgow Lord Provost, Eva Bolander, will be attending.