Introduction

Since the war began in Syria in 2011, hospitals, field clinics, ambulances, and vehicles transporting medicine and medical supplies have been deliberately targeted for destruction by government and opposition forces. Medical personnel have also been arrested, tortured, executed, and disappeared. These crimes against the principle of medical neutrality – which ensures safe access to medical facilities, protects health care workers and their patients, and allows medical workers to provide unbiased care – have compounded the suffering of civilians and hastened the devastation of an already fragile health care system.

“The targeting of the medical community in Syria has reached epic proportions. The insidious attacks on medical professionals, facilities, and transport have devastated the country’s public health infrastructure, exacerbating an already overwhelming crisis.”

- Donna McKay, PHR executive director
Nearly half of the public hospitals in Syria have been damaged, destroyed, or rendered dysfunctional.

**Destruction of Medical Services**

Since January 2014, 14 separate attacks on medical facilities have been corroborated by PHR.¹

As of March 2014, nearly half of the public hospitals in Syria had been damaged, destroyed, or rendered dysfunctional.²

By the last quarter of 2013, 93 percent of ambulances had been damaged, stolen, or destroyed.³

Aleppo Governorate:
- In July 2012, Aleppo’s blood bank was bombed.⁴ Since then, the 2.5 million people living in the city of Aleppo have been without blood supply or blood bags.⁵
- The only hospitals still functioning in Aleppo city are four primary health care centers and five trauma clinics.⁶ Of the city’s 17 pre-war ambulances, only seven remain functioning.⁷

Damascus Governorate:
- As of April 2014, only 2 of 18 medical facilities in Qaboon were functioning, and were only provide basic services, such as first aid.⁸
- In Jobar, there are no functioning medical facilities to serve the 1,900 people in need of health assistance.⁹
- In besieged Yarmouk camp, where there were formerly between 100 and 120 pharmacies, the Palestine Hospital now hosts the only pharmacy still in operation.¹⁰ The Palestine Hospital has been attacked by shelling and rockets on at least two separate occasions.

In Rif Dimashq, 24 out of 44 private hospitals, three out of six public hospitals, and 54 out of 176 health centers are out of service.¹¹

Raqqa National Hospital was the only hospital with dialysis services in Raqqa governorate, serving 200 patients.¹² On March 11, 2014, the hospital’s Kidney Department was aerially bombarded by government forces and the dialysis center was destroyed.¹³

Since the beginning of the crisis, 9 out of 23 existing UNRWA health facilities have been closed due to destruction or insecurity.¹⁴
468 medical personnel have reportedly been killed since the beginning of the conflict.

Loss of Medical Personnel

As of April 30, 2014, 468 medical personnel had reportedly been killed since the beginning of the conflict, including 157 doctors, 94 Nurses, 84 medics, and 45 pharmacists, among others. Little to no mental health services are available, as most mental health professionals have left the country.

As of December 2013, an estimated 15,000 doctors had fled the country.

- As of March 2014, in the rebel-controlled areas of Aleppo city, there were an estimated 10 to 12 general surgeons, three to five orthopedic surgeons, and fewer than 10 internal medicine specialists. As of March 2013, Aleppo city had an estimated population of 2.5 million people.
- While Eastern Ghota had 1,000 doctors before the conflict broke out, an estimated 30 remained as of December 2013.
- As of April 2014, only three doctors were working in the besieged area of Homs city – one of whom is a dentist – to provide care to the 2,000 people who have been trapped there for nearly two years. The rest of the medical staff is comprised of volunteers and medical students who learn through their practice in the field hospitals.

Targeting of Humanitarian Aid Workers

As of March 2014, 34 Syrian Arab Red Crescent workers had died while carrying out humanitarian work in Syria, all clearly displaying the red crescent emblem.

On January 2, 2014, five international Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) staff members were taken from their house in northern Syria; as of March 12, MSF was still working to secure their release.

On February 8, 2014, after a ceasefire was negotiated for the besieged city of Homs, two trucks delivering food and medical supplies to civilians were targeted by heavy fire, leaving a Red Crescent paramedic wounded and forcing the trucks to turn back; regime and rebel forces accused each other of the attacks.

In besieged Yarmouk camp, at least 12 medical workers have been arrested, six of whom remain unaccounted for; one allegedly died from torture and ill-treatment. Many other medical workers have left the camp in fear of arrest.
An estimated 9.3 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria, as of December 2013.\(^27\)

As of April 30, 2014, at least 191 deaths had been caused directly by the denial of access to medical assistance.\(^28\)

In Hama governorate, an average of 30 to 35 malnutrition cases are reported every day by Charity for Social Care, a local NGO running a clinic.\(^29\)

After rebels agreed to a truce to end the year-long government siege of Yarmouk Camp, 18,000 people are still stuck inside the camp, slowly starving to death. As of February 2014, 128 people had died due to starvation and an additional 51 died due to lack of adequate medical treatment.\(^30\) Between March 22 and April 21, 2014, food parcels were distributed to approximately 8,692 people – approximately 15 percent of those in need of food assistance.\(^31\)

In Moadamiya, a besieged district in Western Ghouta, food scarcity has resulted in an average 20 kilograms of weight loss per person.\(^32\) Residents are now allowed to bring in very small amounts of food, but medicine and shelter materials are prohibited and UN and SARC personnel are unable to enter the area and deliver humanitarian assistance.\(^33\)

Syria is facing its first polio outbreak since 1999, with 140 reported cases of acute flaccid paralysis (AFP).\(^34\) The WHO had confirmed 39 cases of polio virus as of April 2014.\(^35\) Iraq has also confirmed its first polio case since 2000 in a six-month-old boy; he was infected with the same strand of the polio virus found in Syria.\(^36\)

Before the war there were fewer than 3,000 cases of leishmaniasis, a parasitic disease caused by unsanitary conditions and exacerbated by malnutrition that affects several internal organs; there are now over 100,000 cases.\(^37\)

In 2010 and 2011, Syria had 26 and 13 reported cases of measles respectively.\(^38\) Vaccination coverage for measles has dropped by 80 percent, and now at least 7,000 people have been infected.\(^39\)

In the first two weeks of January 2014, there were 30 reported cases of Meningitis in children under five, more than double the cases reported during the same time in 2010. Meningitis is preventable with a vaccine. Left untreated, it can kill up to 50 percent of patients and leave others with hearing loss, learning disabilities, and severe brain damage.\(^40\)

An injured Syrian woman rides in the back of a van as it arrives at hospital following an air strike by regime forces in Aleppo.

Photo: TAUSEEF MUSTAFA/AFP/GettyImages
Syria is facing its first polio outbreak since 1999.

Limited Supplies and Medications

Despite UN Security Council Resolution 2139, demanding that all parties increase humanitarian aid and end sieges, medical supplies continue to be blocked by both government and opposition forces. Between March 22 and April 21, 2014, the delivery of medical supplies—which would have assisted 216,015 people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas—was prevented, and only 34 of the 262 (13 percent) of the hard-to-reach locations received humanitarian assistance.\(^{41}\)

An assessment of 111 sub-districts in northern Syria\(^ {42}\) released in January 2014 found that:

- Nearly 500,000 people were in acute need of health assistance and an additional 2.8 million in moderate need of health assistance.
- 20 percent of the population surveyed reported severe or life-threatening problems with access to food.
- In Homs governorate, there was a 15 percent reported morbidity rate for those who contracted diarrhea.\(^ {43}\)

There is a dire need for anesthetics, blood, blood bags, antibiotics, infant vaccines, hospital beds, electricity, fuel, radios, and nurses. Doctors have used old clothes for bandages, and some patients have chosen to be knocked out with a metal bar because anesthetics were unavailable.\(^ {45}\)

As of June 2013, local production of pharmaceuticals had fallen by 90 percent,\(^ {46}\) leading many pharmacists to sell medicine at extremely high prices.\(^ {47}\)

In Daraa governorate, almost half the population is in need of health care. Twelve percent of people are in need of life-saving health assistance, and another 36 percent are in need of moderate health assistance.\(^ {48}\)

Clean water supply in conflict-affected areas has reportedly decreased to one third of pre-crisis levels; water pumping in Deir ez Zor in eastern Syria has dropped by up to 90 percent.\(^ {49}\)

References\(^ {*}\)

1. Compiled from field source interviews, open source videos, articles, reports, and social media.
2. Compiled from field source interviews, open source videos, articles, reports, and social media.

\(^{*}\)The ongoing conflict inside Syria has made the verification of statistics around the crisis particularly challenging. However, Physicians for Human Rights has cross-referenced information and sources whenever possible in order to provide the most accurate and up-to-date numbers and statistics.
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35. http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/SAVE_THE_CHILDREN_A_DEVASTATING_TOLL.PDF
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42. Ibid.

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) uses medicine and science to document and call attention to mass atrocities and severe human rights violations. PHR was founded in 1986 on the idea that health professionals, with their specialized skills, ethical duties, and credible voices, are uniquely positioned to stop human rights violations. PHR’s investigations and expertise are used to advocate for persecuted health workers, the prevention of torture, the investigation of mass atrocities, and holding those who violate human rights accountable.

Nobel Peace Prize Co-laureate

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