

NEWS FROM:

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Bringing Healing to the Middle East

The efforts of two unique ambulance companies located in Baltimore, MD and Israel, show that even during a crisis in the Middle East, the hope for peace and the will to save lives is stronger than ever.

Baltimore, MD (March, 2001) For the first time, the largest African-American ambulance company in Baltimore, MD expands its involvement overseas. TLC (Tender Loving Care) Baltimore Ambulance Services, Inc. will adopt a new member to its family. "Our intention is to bring the staff of a local ambulance company in Israel to Baltimore for one month. We will provide training in the operation and maintenance of the ambulances and equipment, which we are donating to them, so that they can start saving lives immediately upon their return. We will also provide training on better intensive care treatments. Our common goal is to save as many lives as possible in Israel," said the Chairman of TLC the Foundation, Dr. George W. Sloan. Dr. Sloan made this announcement during a board meeting of TLC the Foundation, at their headquarters on Liberty Road, on Friday, January 26, 2001. "This project will bring different people from different countries, races, and religions together. It has the power to show people, all over the world, that things can be different, in the U.S and Israel," said Dr. Sloan.

Dr. Sloan, who has worked and lived in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, appointed Professor Mark Farfel, to head this unique project. "We are going to do this project the right way, and Professor Farfel is the right person to lead it," said Dr. Sloan.

Dr. Farfel is a Jewish Associate Professor in the department of Health Policy and Management at Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health. He is also the Director of the Department of Lead Hazard and Abatement Research for Johns Hopkins-Kennedy Krieger Institute, and a guest researcher at the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC)-Brookdale Institute in Jerusalem. Dr. Farfel has been conducting research on the impact of the Israeli National Health Insurance Law on Arabs and Jews in Israel for the JDC-Brookdale Institute.

Dr. Farfel, who lived in Israel for 3 years, has associations with both Arab and Jewish Israeli communities. "I volunteered to lead this project for two reasons: First, Dr. Sloan and the senior staff at TLC, are committed to bringing healing, literally, to the Middle East. It is fascinating because they do not have a direct involvement in that part of the world.

The second reason is because it is a productive step in the mission of narrowing the gaps between Arabs and Jews in Israel in health knowledge, health status, and accessibility to health services. Although the gaps have narrowed over time, there is still much work to be done.”

Dr. Farfel flew to Israel and met with Dr. Marzouk Khoury in February. Dr. Khoury is an Arab physician and the founder and owner of the Haiat Ambulance Service (Haiat means 'life' in Arabic.) Haiat is a small, private ambulance company and the Israeli partner of ‘TLC’ in the project. Dr. Farfel delivered three pieces of life saving equipment from TLC the Foundation/TLC Baltimore Ambulance Services, Inc.: a Defibrillator (valued at \$7500.00) and 2 Pulse Oximeters (valued at \$575.00 each). "This equipment will definitely help to save lives" said Dr. Sloan.

Dr. Farfel will facilitate additional deliveries of needed medical equipment from ‘TLC’ to Haiat. The Haiat office and clinic are located in the Arab town of Shfaram in the Galilee. “Haiat is one of the few private ambulance companies in Israel that provides mobile intensive care, besides Magen David Adom (the major governmental ambulance company in Israel)” said Dr. Khoury.

When Dr. Farfel visited an Arab-Israeli friend and colleague in 1999, he was introduced to Dr. Khoury. During their conversation, Dr. Farfel learned about the problems that Haiat faces. “I told Professor Farfel about my dream to open the first ambulance company that provides emergency care in the Arab sector in the Galilee,” recalls Khoury. “I knew that I could save people and educate the population in this area because it suffers from a lack of health education and a lot of injuries.” I started Haiat in 1990. I went door-to-door to collect money to buy my first ambulance. I managed to buy a second-hand van, which had to be converted into an ambulance. There were so many problems to deal with that the mission seemed almost impossible” recalled Dr. Khoury. “I founded Haiat in order to give the 200,000 residents of this area, Arabs and Jews alike, faster emergency care” said Dr. Khoury. “We serve Arab towns and villages including, Nazareth, Shfaram, Tamra, Manda, and others, but it is important to say that we do not limit our services to the Arab population. We offer emergency care to everyone,” said Dr. Khoury. "When we are called to rescue the injured from a road accident, we do not know the religion of the persons in need, their skin color, or their nationality, and we do not care” he emphasized. When we respond, our only concern is to help the injured. Nothing else is important to us. We are giving emergency services to Kibbutzim and other Jewish communities in the area that do not have their own ambulances. Even our staff includes Arabs and Jews alike."

“It is very important that a number of organizations will be active in the Galilee area, because there are several problems that need to be solved” said Dr. Khoury. “For instance: sometimes the ambulance teams cannot find those in need of emergency care because there are no street addresses in Arab towns and villages in the Galilee, even if there were, the locals might use informal names for those places. So, when a non-local intensive care ambulance team is trying to locate people in an Arab village, this task can take longer and endanger lives. Our problems do not end there. There are a variety of additional problems” said Dr. Khoury. “The Arab population in this area lacks adequate health education. Therefore, some of the services that the company is providing are lectures about first aid, in schools and the community. Another problem is the shortage of Arab paramedics. The ability to communicate with a wounded person in situations of emergency care is of grave importance. If the paramedic does not understand Arabic, it is much more difficult for him to treat the patient in these situations. There are very few Arab paramedics, and almost all of them are working for Haiat”. Haiat receives medical backup and guidance from the trauma unit at the Rambam Medical Center, in Haifa. “We are working in full cooperation with Rambam Hospital. Once a month we are conducting joint meetings with the trauma personnel from Rambam Hospital. Haiat faces very serious problems because it is not funded or supported by any governmental or private organizations” Dr. Khoury explained. “It is very common that intensive care units belong to state, city, medical centers, or public organizations.” “I explained to Professor Farfel that if we do not find an organization that will support us, our future is uncertain. In Israel, there is no connection between private intensive care ambulance companies and the hospitals. We are looking for help from any organization in Israel or overseas”. It is wonderful that Dr. Sloan and Dr. Farfel decided to help.

“Dr. Farfel heard about our problem and volunteered to represent our company in the Baltimore area,” said Dr. Khoury. Dr. Farfel searched for local ambulance companies that would help Haiat. After a short while, Dr. Sloan and TLC rose to the challenge. “It is a unique challenge. We are refitting the ambulances that will be shipped to Israel. We are changing the face of TLC itself, so it can facilitate this project. We are designing a special division at TLC to coordinate this program,” said Dr. Sloan.

The efforts of these ambulance companies show that even during crisis in the Middle East, the hope for peace and the will to save lives is stronger than ever. This project was blessed to find a supporter and colleague of Dr. Sloan's caliber. Dr. Sloan is a physician, who has been involved with the development of health care services in the United States, Africa, and Asia. His interest with the Jewish community extends over many years from his upbringing as a youth living in a multi-cultural community. He and his family have a long history of partnership with many nationalities. The combination of the three unique men, Dr. Sloan, Dr. Farfel and Dr. Khoury, with their background, credentials, goals, and ambitions is a vital step in bringing healing to the Middle East.

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