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Meeting the demands of universal coverage through a family centred approach: the case of primary health care services in Palestine

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Background: Since the Alma Ata declaration the Palestinian health system has adopted the principles of primary health care and made remarkable gains particularly in relation to maternal and child health services and controlling communicable diseases. The current system is unable to respond to the rights of clients to universal health coverage; complex political and social factors, an epidemiological transition of disease where Non Communicable Diseases are increasing, coupled with demographic changes of an aging population and a large youth segment. The health services within the United Nations Relief Works Agency for refugees (UNRWA) saw an opportunity to move their health system towards a family centered approach that optimizes efforts of the team and responds to the needs of clients in their right to continuity of care. **Method:** The stepped approach for providing family centered care was based on:

- Community participation to ensure understanding and support
- Multidisciplinary teams; reorienting teams towards a family centered approach and designating families to each team to be cared for across their life cycle
- “Task shifting” as a core principle; training and expanding roles of the team members to take on a holistic approach in managing the care of the families assigned to them.

Results:

- Increased patient and staff satisfaction
- Reduced patient load; allowing doctors to spend more time where needed
- Expose the staff to new principles in care; integration of mental health and child protection
- Rationalization of antibiotic use

Conclusions: The success of this effort has led to a snowballing effect; opening up the debate in Palestine with the Ministry of Health for a family centered approach across the primary health care services in general, debating family health vs family medicine. In collaboration with Global Doctors and Partners in Practice, we invite for sharing of experiences and current ways of adopting a Family Centered Approach.