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## Bolstering Local Hospital Capacity to Combat COVID-19 in the West Bank

When the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic first reached the West Bank in March 2020, Beit Jala Hospital and other health care facilities in the area quickly mobilized to respond, with the support of the Palestinian Ministry of Health. However, hospitals soon became overwhelmed by a rapidly increasing caseload, leaving health care staff unable to meet the needs of all COVID-19 patients or to adequately protect themselves from the disease.

In response, with \$6 million in USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA) funding, non-governmental organization Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is providing comprehensive support to Beit Jala and 13 other hospitals across the West Bank to strengthen their capacity to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) lead Ibrahim Alsaouri said, “Before the project, our ability [to respond to COVID-19] was limited. We are so thankful for the great support of this project.” He noted that the project, which includes the provision of essential medical supplies and infrastructure enhancements, has enabled them to receive more patients.



Photo Courtesy of CRS

In addition, USAID/BHA’s support enabled Beit Jala to expand intensive care unit capacity with appropriate equipment and provide supplies for a new COVID-19 triage area. CRS has also provided critical training on IPC measures to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Beit Jala Quality Control Officer Abdel Nasser Qisi said, “The training helped us a lot because those people who received the training came back to the hospital and trained other staff [including] cleaners, ambulance drivers, cooks, nurses and doctors... This really helped us to decrease the spread of COVID-19 inside the hospital.”

Through the provision of critical medical equipment and training, USAID/BHA continues to support local hospital capacity to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and maintain essential health care services throughout the West Bank. Discussing the project, Beit Jala Hospital Director Dr. Ghada Kawaa emphasized, “Thanks to the timely response, we are saving many lives every day.”