



State Comptroller | Collection of Special Reports |  
March 2023

State Comptroller Office

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**Interim Report:  
Children  
Hospitalization –  
State Comptroller  
Visit to Tel Aviv  
Souraski Medical  
Center (Ichilov) and  
Barzilai Medical  
Center in Ashkelon**





## Interim Report: Children Hospitalization – State Comptroller Visit to Tel Aviv Souraski Medical Center (Ichilov) and Barzilai Medical Center in Ashkelon

### Background

On December 13th, 2022 (the day of the visit), the State Comptroller, the Director General of the State Comptroller Office, and two audit teams visited Dana-Dwek Children's Hospital at Tel Aviv Souraski Medical Center (Ichilov-Dana or Dana) and Barzilai Medical Center in Ashkelon (Barzilai)<sup>1</sup>. The visits were conducted at the two hospitals simultaneously and were part of the audit the State Comptroller Office carried out at the time in the Ministry of Health and general hospitals about children's hospitalization.

The visits were conducted as a "visit on short notice." The hospital's management received notice only a few days before the visit. The teams visited the pediatric departments, pediatric patient rooms, public areas, intensive care units, pediatric emergency department, hematology department<sup>2</sup>, and children's classrooms. The audit teams observed the conditions and infrastructures at the departments and held conversations with parents and admitted children to understand the course of hospitalization and its conditions. Moreover, the teams met with the hospitals' management, the medical, nursing, and para-medical staff – social worker, and teachers.

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1 Tel Aviv Souraski Medical Center is a municipal-governmental hospital. A substantial part of its HR procedures is managed by the municipality. Barzilai Medical Center is a governmental hospital.

2 The department treats pediatric cancer patients and pediatric patients with non-malignant hematological disease.



## Key Figures

**about**

**500,000**

number of residents in the Barzilai area

**6;28 beds**

according to Barzilai's certificate of registration, the official number of beds is 28 beds in the Pediatric Department and 6 beds in the ICU. In practice, on the day of the visit, there were 23 children (82% of the official number) and 6 children (100% of the official number) admitted respectively

**10;31 beds**

according to Dana's certificate of registration, the official number of beds is 31 beds in the Pediatric Department and 10 beds in Hemato-Oncology. In practice, on the day of the visit, there were 42 children (135%) and 21 (210%), respectively – 11 children above the official number in each of the departments

**48 beds**

at the Pediatric Ward in Barzilai, according to the certificate of registration (Pediatric Department, ICU, Surgery and Emergency Department)

**86 beds**

at Dana according to the certificate of registration (Pediatric Department, ICU, Surgery, Orthopedics, Hemato-Oncology, Rehabilitation and Emergency Department)





## Key Findings



**Beds Occupancy in Pediatric Departments – Barzilai** – on the day of the visit, the Pediatric Department was not fully occupied, and 23 children were admitted to the department (82%). Six additional children were admitted to the Pediatric ICU (full occupancy). The hospital's general director pointed out the method of calculating occupancy in hospitalization departments, which does not reflect the actual occupancy. According to the general director, the occupancy is calculated daily at midnight; however, this calculation does not reflect the number of children that were taken care of at the department on that day since, during the day, there are patients awaiting discharge and



new patients who are admitted. **Ichilov-Dana** – on the day of the visit, there was over-occupancy at the Pediatric Department – 42 children were admitted (11 above the official number of beds – 31) in the Pediatric Department, and 5 children were admitted in a satellite department<sup>3</sup> – Pediatric Surgery.

-  **Pediatric ICU – Barzilai** – the unit employs a pediatric ICU specialist. There is an official vacancy for another pediatric ICU specialist, which has not been manned yet. It was indicated that the unit specialist had been absent for 15 days the previous year, during which he was either replaced by a pediatric pulmonary specialist (half of the time) and the unit had been closed (half of the time). In addition, whenever the ICU is fully occupied, there is sometimes a need to transfer children to the Pediatric Department, which is less suitable for their condition. The specialist pointed out a shortage of a US machine with designated cardiac echo needed for treating children in ICU and a special device measuring oxygen and carbon dioxide levels, which enables non-invasive monitoring, so there is no need for needle sticks.
-  **Transfer from the Pediatric Emergency Department to the Pediatric Department – Ichilov-Dana** – a parent of an admitted child pointed out that they had arrived at the Pediatric Emergency Department at 1:00 and were taken to the Department only at 11:00 in the morning, which means they had stayed at the Pediatric Emergency Department for 10 hours.
-  **Mental Health and Pediatric Rehabilitation – Barzilai** – during the visit, it was indicated that solutions for eating disorders are insufficient and that children who need mental health treatments have to wait for many months so that people who can afford private treatments choose to do so, and others are forced to wait for a very long time. It was further indicated that the pediatric rehabilitation services are minimal and provided by Alyn Hospital, which is a public hospital, Clalit's Loewenstein Rehabilitation Hospital, Pediatric Rehabilitation Department at Sheba-Safra and the Adi – Nahalat Eran Rehabilitation Village in the Negev.
-  **Maintaining Educational Routines During Hospitalization – Ichilov-Dana** – the hospital's General Director, indicated a gap between the official size of the educational staff and the actual need. The official number of educators was determined according to the official number of beds in the hospital's certificate of registration. However, the actual number of beds is regularly higher than the official number, and additional beds are added for additional admitted children. The staff emphasized that recruiting national service volunteers to work at the department is challenging. **Barzilai** – the staff pointed

3 Satellite Department – the department in which the patient is hospitalized while a different medical department is responsible for patient care (in this case, the Pediatric Department is responsible). See Ministry Of Health's Circular: [https://www.health.gov.il/hozer/mr50\\_2011.pdf](https://www.health.gov.il/hozer/mr50_2011.pdf), Medical Administration Circular No. 50/2011 – appointment of medical "case manager" for admitted patients.



out that there is a need for a professional math teacher to prepare children for the matriculation exam.



**Pediatric Ward Manpower – Barzilai – Medical Staff** – it was indicated that all interns at Barzilai graduated from faculties of medicine abroad rather than Israeli faculties of medicine. During the visit, the audit team learned about difficulties recruiting interns and specialists for hospitals in the periphery. It turned out that there is only one specialist in each medical discipline, so sometimes, there is a shortage of physicians in different disciplines. For example, the hospital managed to recruit a pediatric neurologist only in 2019. It was further found that due to the shortage of specialist pediatricians, many physicians who treat children in the south of Israel are not specialist pediatricians but family physicians or general physicians who were not trained in pediatrics. **Dana – Medical Staff** – the hospital claims that the official number of physicians is insufficient and does not meet the hospital's needs and that the hospital overcomes this problem through agreements with the Tel Aviv - Jaffa Municipality and with the various HMOs, which improve its ability to recruit and employ pediatric interns and specialists. **Nursing Staff** – a nurse from the pediatric department in Barzilai indicated that the nurses are overburdened and that there is a shortage of nurses. **Para-Medical Staff<sup>4</sup>** – one social worker is employed at the pediatric department at Barzilai and she provides services to the entire pediatric ward. Moreover, there is no standardization for para-medical professionals.



**Lack of Palliative Care<sup>5</sup> for Children with Malignant Diseases – Ichilov-Dana** – the General Director of Dana, indicated that about 20% of the children with malignant diseases hospitalized at the Pediatric Hemato-Oncology department require palliative care for pain. Still, the nursing staff shortage and designated standardization personnel do not enable such care. The shortage of para-medical standardization personnel might lead to a situation where the hospital could not employ these professionals, compromising the care provided to the children and the service provided to their families.



**Maintaining Educational Routines During Hospitalization** – both Barzilai and Dana keep educational routines for the children during the hospitalization in addition to emotional support and sharing of medical information in a manner suitable for their age. The audit team commends the sectorial and linguistic adaptation of the educational staff.

4 amongst the professions – speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, social work.

5 Palliative Care – supportive care intended to improve quality of life of patients who cope with incurable diseases and their families. while taking into account the emotional aspects related to coping with the disease by the patient and patient's family, so that they would be able to live independently and with dignity as much as possible despite the disease.



**Patient and Accompaniers' Experience – Accommodation, Hotels, Care and Receiving Information - Barzilai** – the parents are satisfied with the conduct of the medical staff, the nursing staff (in particular), and with the conditions at the Pediatric Department and the Pediatric ICU at Barzilai. **Ichilov-Dana** – the parents are satisfied with the medical and nursing staff's conduct and level of care.

## Key Recommendations

- 💡 It is recommended that the Ministry of Health collect data about the current situation and the long-term forecast of demographic growth, including geographic distribution of the population, child morbidity forecast, and additional components as needed. Accordingly, it should prepare a multi-annual plan determining the number of beds required at pediatric wards and an appropriate budget based on this multi-annual plan. It is further recommended that the Ministry of Health address the claims about the occupancy calculation at the departments and consider exceptional occupancies that require special attention.
- 💡 It is recommended that the Ministry of Health examine whether the official number of beds at the Pediatric ICU in Barzilai meets the actual need. It is recommended that Barzilai Hospital examine the need for a designated US machine for the unit and an oxygen and carbon dioxide measuring device that might facilitate children's stay. In addition, the Ministry of Health should use its tools to assist in recruiting an ICU specialist for the hospital.
- 💡 It is recommended that the Ministry of Health examine the national needs for beds to treat patients with eating disorders – how many beds are required, the current number of beds – and prepare an appropriate plan for the various medical centers and designated institutions. As for rehabilitation, it is recommended that the Ministry examine the national needs for pediatric rehabilitation beds – how many of them are needed as opposed to the current number of beds at the various medical centers and designated institutions.
- 💡 **Medical Staff** – it is recommended that the Ministry assist in training physicians according to the current and future needs of the health care system. It is recommended that the Ministry of Health and the HMOs form a plan to meet the need for pediatric specialists in the community. Moreover, it is recommended that the Ministry examine the hospitals' needs for pediatric specialists.
- 💡 **Nursing Staff** – it is recommended that the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance, and the Civil Service Commission examine, together with relevant professional associations, the compatibility of nursing standardization personnel, especially in pediatric departments, to current needs, the various geographical areas, demography and occupancy at different departments.



**Para-Medical Staff** – it is recommended that the Ministry of Health map the para-medical professions across all hospitals and set recommended standardization personnel for these professions to meet patients' needs. The Ministry should consider a multi-annual plan to supplement the necessary services.



It is recommended that the Ministry of Health consider appropriate solutions for palliative care of general patients and children hospitalized at Hemato-Oncological departments in particular and their implementation.

picture 1: **Pediatric Department at Barzilai**   picture 2: **Ground Floor of Dana**



The Audit Team took the pictures on December 13th, 2022.

Parents' comments during the State Comptroller's visit:



Mom is very satisfied. The child just came back from an activity, she draws, there are clowns and magicians and she likes the food.



Waited a long time at the Pediatric Emergency Department.  
– arrived there at 1:00 AM and were transferred to the Department at 11:00 AM (spent 10 hours at the Emergency Department) ...



The staff at the department is "amazing"  
– they are attentive and explain everything. We have had some professional differences with the physicians, but we always received satisfactory answers. There are good conditions for the parents.  
We are satisfied with the educational activities. The place is aesthetic but there are some renovation works on the floor above, so there is noise from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM.





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## Summary

During the visit of the State Comptroller, the director general of the State Comptroller Office, and the audit teams at Dana-Ichilov and Barzilai Hospitals, some significant issues that were previously discussed in various State Comptroller Office reports were brought up by the general directors of the hospitals and the medical and nursing staffs. Amongst these issues was the lack of a multi-annual plan determining the number of beds required at the various wards, including pediatric wards, the desirable occupancy rate at the various hospitals, and the significant shortage of medical, nursing, and para-medical staff. An additional gap was raised during the visit – the need for a PET-CT machine required for patients' care<sup>6</sup>.

The State Comptroller Office notes that it is evident that the medical, nursing, and other staff make all necessary efforts to improve the hospitalization experience for children and their families. The parents also mentioned their children's positive experiences at the pediatric departments; however, they indicated long waiting times at the pediatric emergency departments. It is recommended that the Ministry of Health, Ichilov-Dana, and Barzilai examine the report and rectify the noted deficiencies.

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6 The PET-CT is used for cancer detection and follow-up, for detection of inflammatory and infectious processes and for assessing various neurological disorders.

