

Physical therapists treating communities evacuated from war zones to hotels in Israel

Noga Gal, BPT, MSc, MBA¹, Ricki Dahan-Cohen, BPT, BA, MSc PT², Tomer Nobel BPT, MPT³

¹ Tel Aviv University, Asaf Harofeh PT school - Shamir Medical Center

² Pelvic floor PT- Lehavim Clinic, Teacher and Teaching assistant - Physiotouch seminars

³ Physionobel, BeitYona Rehabilitation Center, Ben Gurion University

Abstract

On the seventh of October 2023, we were left stunned by the terrible massacre that took place in communities residing in southern Israel. Thousands were killed and injured; and over a hundred thousand children, women, and men were evacuated from their homes and brought to stay at hotels throughout Israel. Many of the evacuees suffered physical and/or mental injuries as a result of the trauma. Out of the strong desire to offer help, and the understanding that the physical therapy profession has the necessary tools to be of assistance in such situations, official and voluntary projects were launched to provide physical therapy treatments to the evacuated individuals. One such voluntary project provided physical therapy treatments to evacuees who were transferred to hotels in Eilat and the Dead Sea region. About 25 physical therapists participated in the project and treated approximately 300 evacuees. The project began the day after the massacre, on October 8, and officially ended on November 30, 2023. About 800 treatments were performed during this period.

The special circumstances created a unique combination of indications for treatment ranging from pain and injuries that occurred as a result of the events of October 7th, to situations that required continued treatment which had been interrupted due to the war. The severe physical and psychological trauma encountered by the patients increased the necessity of a holistic approach addressing dominant mind-body interactions. Experience demonstrated that physical therapy may have a significant effect on these patients, and that physical therapy can play an important role as a first-line treatment for disaster victims.

The purpose of this article is to describe the volunteer project and present thoughts and insights that arose as a result of its operation.

Keywords: physical therapy, trauma, mind-body, volunteer