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PUBLICATION:	Egyptian Gazette
DATE:	12-September-2015
COUNTRY:	Egypt
CIRCULATION:	60,000
TITLE :	NGOs keen on sending health teams to the poor
PAGE:	02
ARTICLE TYPE:	Drug-Related News
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NGOs keen on sending health teams to the poor

Amina Abdul Salam

THERE is a growing interest on the part of Egypt's civil society to send mobile health teams to remote and deprived areas across Egypt.

The teams usually contain highly-qualified medical professionals in all fields. These teams have so far examined and offered treatment to a large number of residents of these areas. Surgeries were carried out and compensatory devices were given to those in need.

Nevertheless, specialists say more teams need to be sent to remote areas.

"They [the teams] should go to areas where there is a shortage of doctors and hospitals," Ahmed Hussein, a Medical Association official, told the Arabic language daily *Al-Ahram* in an interview.

"Team members also need to spend some time in these areas in order to follow up the cases they examine," he added.

The Medical Association sends its own teams to places as far as the Sinai

Peninsula, the southern Governorate of Aswan and areas on the border between Egypt and Sudan.

Teams sent by other civil society organisations have also offered treatment and carried out surgeries in the same areas. The surgeries included cochlear implants.

Some of the teams have, meanwhile, come under fire, while some people say that they include inexperienced medical practitioners and raw-graduated School of Medicine students.

Despite this, other people speak in support of the teams and even call for supplying them with the required medical equipment for their members to carry out their job of offering healthcare to the poor and the deprived properly.

Hussein said the team sent by the Medical Association to North Sinai spent ten days there.

"It was made up – among others – of emergency and intensive care specialists," he said. "Team surgeons performed facial and orthopedic opera-

tions," he added. He noted that the association also sent a team of ophthalmologists to the southern Governorate of Luxor and that the team spent three days there.

"They examined 900 people and performed 70 cataract surgeries," Hussein said.

He referred to coordination between his association and other civil society organizations with the aim of integrating the work of both sides for the benefit of the patients.

The teams depend on donations to buy the required medicines and equipment, according to Ahmed Fadl, another Medical Association official.

He added that almost all specialists within the teams work on a voluntary basis.

Mobile health teams were first formed in 2011 under former Health Minister Hatem el-Gabali. They were, however, suspended for sometime later when the government discovered that some of the teams were used by some politicians for the achievement of political and electoral gains.



PATIENTS queuing in front of one of the medical convoys headquarters in Qena, Upper Egypt, to receive treatments. The main aim of medical convoys is to reach patients in remote areas.