

A Reflective Account of Humanitarian Service

[Ofrah Al-Muflahi](#)

My sabbatical began with a strong sense of purpose, anticipation and a deep commitment to humanitarian service, yet, it unfolded in ways I could never have predicted; challenging me personally, professionally, and emotionally. Ultimately strengthening both my practice as a nurse and my resolve to serve displaced and vulnerable communities.

Time in Amman **Bearing Witness**

Much of my sabbatical was spent in Amman, where I worked closely with Syrian and Palestinian refugees and

I am pleased to say; reconnecting with clinical colleagues serving these communities.



With new friends from UNRWA

In refugee centres, I listened to parents speak quietly about lost homes, interrupted education, and the uncertainty of raising children in prolonged displacement.

At times, it was difficult to absorb the weight of these stories.

Particularly those of women and children, whose experiences carried layers of loss, resilience, and often unspoken trauma.

I watched children play in confined spaces with extraordinary imagination.

I saw dignity persist, even in scarcity.

I came to understand that humanitarian work is not only about delivering care. It is about being present.

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It is about listening without interruption, acknowledging suffering without rushing to fix it, and recognising strength even when circumstances are unjust.

At its heart, it is about compassion. Which is the very essence of nursing.

Hospitals and War-Affected Families

Visits to local hospitals were among the most powerful experiences of my time in Jordan.



Ahmad a 15 year old boy shot in the face in Gaza whilst queuing for food. His father was killed. With him, my beautiful friend Duha, who also sustained a serious facial shrapnel injury, and sadly lost 3 of her 4 children.

I met Palestinian women and children living with the long-term consequences of war-related injuries both visible and unseen.

Some children bore surgical scars; others carried quieter wounds; anxiety, *hypervigilance*, and disrupted development.

These encounters were a reminder that trauma does not end when conflict disappears from the headlines.

It stays with people; in their bodies, their minds, and their memories.

Spending time at the bedside reinforced my belief in holistic, trauma-informed care.

Healing in these settings requires more than clinical expertise.

It calls for patience,

cultural understanding, and a commitment to restoring dignity.

Learning from Humanitarian Leadership

Working in relief organisations.

The Jordan Red Crescent and partners collaborating with the World Health Organisation, seeing first hand, their work gave me valuable insight into how humanitarian principles; neutrality, impartiality, and humanity, are put into practice.

I saw the complexity of delivering mental health services, maternal care, and community outreach in environments that are both resource-limited and politically sensitive.

What stayed with me most was the quiet persistence of those delivering care.

Many of my colleagues have worked in these settings for years, navigating bureaucracy, funding challenges, and emotional strain, yet

continuing to show up each day with professionalism and compassion.

Their work is not dramatic. It is steady, and it is deeply transformative.

It strengthens not just individuals, but entire health systems.

Personal Reflection

From Experience to Purpose

Looking back, this experience has reshaped my understanding of what it means to care.

Humanitarian work is not abstract.

It exists within complex political realities and deeply personal human stories. To serve in these environments requires not only clinical skill, but emotional resilience, humility, and moral courage.

My time in Jordan reaffirmed that compassion is a choice.

A decision to *remain present* in the face of suffering.

- To listen.
- To support.
- To stand alongside others.



Two medical colleagues. One on the right is a professor, a 'fabulous human being' and now a friend for life. He is a *neurohabilitation* and pain expert. A Cambridge and Oxford Fellow and you [can read more](#) about him here [and here](#).

The other is Dr. Khamis Elessi is a [spinal, neurological & acupuncture specialist](#).

Education, Workforce, and Hope

Visits to nursing schools and healthcare education centres.

Invaluable in offering a hopeful perspective. I met students preparing to serve communities shaped by displacement and instability.

Conversations with nursing leaders, particularly in mental health and maternity care, focused on workforce sustainability, trauma-informed practice.

Plus, the growing leadership role of nurses in humanitarian settings.

In these classrooms, I saw the future.

Investment in education is an act of long-term humanitarian care.

Witnessing the resilience of refugees, the dedication of healthcare professionals, and the strength of communities living with uncertainty has profoundly influenced both my professional practice and my personal outlook.

This sabbatical has not only broadened my experience. It has deepened my humanity.

I return with a renewed commitment to equity in healthcare, to trauma-informed practice, and to supporting those whose lives are shaped by displacement and conflict.

I carry with me a simple but powerful reminder: even in the most difficult circumstances, dignity endures...

...and so must we.

Continuing the Journey

My journey does not end here.

My humanitarian work continues through www.banma.org.uk and through the relationships and partnerships I have built.

I remain committed to serving for as long as I can.

Despite the scary difficulties I encountered at one point, gaining access; including being detained and questioned for several hours on arrival...

... the experience was unquestionably worthwhile.

If anything, it deepened my empathy and reinforced the importance of the work.

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[More details here.](#)



... with NGO colleagues from Indonesia and England.

