

Health & Wellness | Interview | Nechama Nulman of Chaim V'Chessed

Helping Anglos Get the Medical Care They Need

Chaim V'Chessed is a multi-faceted organization that provides numerous services to Israel's English-speaking population. Mrs. Nechama Nulman is the director of Chaim V'Chessed's medical department. She manages all aspects of medical logistics, and coordinates the activities of Chaim V'Chessed staffers, healthcare providers and hospital stays to ensure that patients' needs are met both during and beyond Chaim V'Chessed's involvement.

How would you describe what you do?

I am the first address for all of Chaim V'Chessed's medical inquiries, and I deal with case management. Sometimes, I can provide the necessary information; other times, I make the appropriate connections with fellow Chaim V'Chessed staff members or with professionals or volunteers outside the organization.

What types of medical inquiries do you deal with, and how?

The Israeli health care system is very different to what Anglos are used to. We get calls from English-speakers dealing with situations that range from regular, everyday medical questions to life-and-death crises.

I guide people on how to deal with their kupot cholim when issues come up, either as a result of the language barrier or due to confusion on the patient or secretary's part. This often happens when the service requested is not a common one. We have connections with knowledgeable representatives in each kupat cholim who work well with us, hear us out and see if they can help—even if the first answer was no.

We also provide guidance on standard medical protocol, like scheduling appointments, preparing for procedures, and accessing test results.

We do not offer medical referrals; when patients reach out to us, we direct them to yo'atzim who can offer appropriate medical referrals, and ask them to call back with the name of their doctor of choice so that we can help them move forward. Additionally, we answer questions on medical insurance for tourists, students and long-time residents, including those with preexisting medical conditions, for whom the options are far more limited.

Last but not least, we often help by simply being here and offering support. Sometimes, all a person needs to hear is, "It's normal," or, "This is what the next step is and I'll call you back to find out how it went." Even when a person is not in immediate crisis, we can offer the honest reassurance that he or she is not alone.

Can you give examples of cases you are working on now?

One case we are dealing with now, involves a sought-after surgeon who comes to work in Israel twice a year. He operated a while ago on a child from Israel in the United States and the family is trying to

get him to complete the procedure during his next trip to Israel. We are advocating for kupat cholim coverage and are also working to secure an appointment with the doctor.

Another caller is waiting for approval from his kupat cholim for a certain, hard-to-obtain medication. In the meantime, we got hold of samples so he can begin treatment.

Of course, we are constantly working to expedite critical hospital appointments. When patients truly need their scheduled appointments sooner, either because of intense pain, inability to function, or severe medical complications, we use our connections and know-how to secure earlier appointments.

What brought you to medical field advocacy?

Living in Israel for 21 years and raising a family here has given me enough of a background to share with others. Additionally, my family recently endured a crisis that resulted in almost two years of medical and hospital intervention, and my knowledge, unfortunately, became even more extensive. The truth is that I was always interested in the field and I enjoy helping people.

Do you have any advice for members of the English-speaking community?

Number one, make sure your insurance coverage is always up to date. If you're a student or tourist visa holder, it is especially important to stay on top of every family member's visa—it is the only way to keep your Bituach Leumi account active.

Number two, always make sure you get a clear answer from the secretary or doctor before you walk away. Do not hesitate to keep asking until you understand the situation perfectly. So many headaches are caused by misunderstandings.

Lastly, keep in mind the famous rule: if the answer is no, try again—whether the question was about reimbursement, coverage for a procedure, or a service of some sort. That mentality is foreign to Anglos who come from countries where a law is a law.

Here it won't be so clear, different clinics or different employees are more or less knowledgeable and can help in different ways. "No" might just mean that the person you spoke to first can't help you.

ABOUT CHAIM V'CHESSED

Chaim V'Chessed is a non-profit organization that helps English speakers navigate all areas of crisis or difficulty in Israel. Their phone hotline operates 9-5, Sunday through Thursday, with an emergency notification system that operates 24/6. Learn more at www.chaimvchessed.com.

Chaim V'Chessed can be reached at 072-CHESSED (243-7733), by email at support@chaimvchessed.com or online at www.chaimvchessed.com/contact-us.