

Avi Benlolo: In a hospital under fire from Gaza, we see the best of Israel

Avi Benlolo, National Post · Aug. 14, 2014 | Last Updated: Aug. 14, 2014 7:06 AM ET



Without realizing it, Dr. Darawasha has already made a breakthrough alongside his Jewish colleagues at Barzilai Hospital. In a micro-institutional system which embraces mutual respect, they are demonstrating how Jews and Arabs work together in Israel.

Ashkelon, Israel — Everyone at Barzilai Hospital in the Southern Israeli city of Ashkelon loves Dr. Rabia Darawasha. An Israeli-Arab, he represents the best of Israel. All too often, we hear cruel defamatory slander against Israel. But if a nation's advancement is defined by how it treats its minorities, Dr. Darawasha is a case in point showcasing Israel's freedom and democracy for all.

He is warmly embraced by his colleagues who flow into our interview room at the hospital

emergency room to stand beside him in support — and he responds to them jovially with a twinkle in his eye. Like family, doctors and nurses freely jump into our conversation — “he is a hero here at the hospital,” they say. “He comes over for coffee all the time and we joke around. ... The kids love him,” another colleague says.

Since Barzilai Hospital is a stone's-throw away from the Gaza Strip, it treats wounded Israeli soldiers. While the hospital also treats Palestinian civilians from Gaza, Hamas rockets land in its vicinity and “Code Red” alerts send staff and Israeli and Palestinian patients scrambling for cover. Paradoxically, the hospital also saves wounded Hamas terrorists.

A general surgeon, Dr. Darawasha has been intimately involved in saving many Israeli soldiers throughout the conflict. “Everyone sees you as a doctor,” says Dr.

Darawasha. “But when the war started, I thought soldiers would look at me strangely — that they would be angry with me. But they were so kind and understanding.”

Dr. Darawasha is open about his views. I asked him if treating Israeli soldiers was difficult for him. He replied, “The Hamas do not represent me. The soldiers represent me. I feel like I did something for this country as a doctor.” He added, “Gaza does not represent me. This is my country; my family is here.”

Israel has been good to Dr. Darawasha and his family. He comes from Iksal Village, in the Northern part of Israel. His father and uncle, he says, have always had positive interactions with the Jewish people — both socially and professionally. As an Arab, he has never felt discriminated against or treated as a second-class citizen by Israel.

In fact, he feels he owes his country a great debt. When he graduated from medical school in Romania and returned to Israel, it was Israel that embraced him, gave him money to continue his studies and gave him job opportunities. He has always felt at home in Israel.

Dr. Darawasha is focused on his future — on learning, on improving and on making the world around him a better place. He says his dream is to be different. “I want to invent a new surgery. I have some ideas already that I am working on. I want to have a big breakthrough.”

Without realizing it, Dr. Darawasha has already made a breakthrough alongside his Jewish colleagues at Barzilai Hospital. In a micro-institutional system which embraces mutual respect, they are demonstrating how Jews and Arabs work together in Israel. In a way, they are forging peace together and winning the war against Hamas and extremism.