



In conversation with: Marlene I.B. Katanasho

Muristan's In-Charge Nurse, Ophthalmic Nurse Practitioner



Marlene joined St. John Eye Hospital Group back in 1992 and is now the Charge Nurse at the Muristan Clinic in the Old City of Jerusalem.

"I was born and raised here in the Old City of Jerusalem, and I was trained as a licensed practical nurse here with St. John back in 1992, I had a conversational course and then achieved a degree in General Nursing at the University. Since then I have been the Nurse Practitioner [Charge Nurse] here for St. John at the Muristan Clinic since 2016"

The clinic sits right in the middle of the Armenian, Christian, Jewish and Muslim Quarters and Marlene thinks of it as her second home, so she always worries about its future.

"The clinic is like a walk-in clinic, so anyone can knock on the door and is offered help or treatment. Before I joined I had a relative who had problems with her eyes and it wasn't easy to get any treatment. It was a bad experience for her and if I had known about St. John and the treatment and the people, then I could have helped her at that time. A simple person but she was really ill and we couldn't help her. When I heard about St. John running a course, I thought that this is my chance, there were a great many people who applied and 20 were chosen and I was so glad one of them was me. 30 years later, it is like my family now."

The role:

"It varies a lot as I do everything, I have to see and welcome them and do all the Registrations, I triage them, get them appointments for assessment at the hospital if they need any specialized tests or if it is minor cases, they come back here."

"As the Nurse Practitioner, I have to assess the patient, look after them if it is an emergency, and in Israel I am not allowed to prescribe some treatments, so I have to get them to understand and to come back to see the Doctor."

"It can get very busy, sometimes we see 3,4 or 5 new patients every hour because we don't see by appointment, anybody can come anytime and be seen."



And as if on cue, that was exactly what happened!

A walk-in new patient arrived with their mother to see if they could get help.

When we resumed, we were talking about the clinic itself.

"From the roof, you can see all the communities, and there are many, especially old people who have been treated here, have had surgery here, that come back, and sometimes bring their family, and ask if they can see the place and look out across the city. I say of course and these people really appreciate St. John and this clinic being open for them and so close to them."

Marlene's work extends right into these communities.

"In the mornings, before coming to the clinic, I often do school screenings. I go to the schools, and I check the vision for the children. If I suspect there is a child that can't see well or has a problem then I send them to St. John to be assessed over there."

"Yesterday I saw 63 children and there were 20 or 25 that needed more assessment and these were not minor things, some have a real problem and they knew they had a problem but didn't admit it".

"I also go to centres where there are workers and I do lecturing in health promotion and prevention and what to do in an emergency, so I keep myself very busy!"

"I have to close the clinic when I go out for the screenings because there are no other staff here. If I am on annual leave, then somebody comes for the afternoons for a few hours, but generally, I do this thing myself, luckily I live just a few minutes away. My phone at home is always ringing with people, friends and neighbours wanting to know about the clinic and when it is open."

What do you like about the clinic here:

"We see everyone, not just Palestinians, last week we had a tourist, she was American and she had a problem with her eyes. She had gone to the pharmacy and they had sent her here. I spend time going to all the places, shops, restaurants so that they know there is a clinic here. Sometimes we have people stop here because they are interested in the history of St. John, they see the badge and come in to ask. It is a very special place."

"I love working here, we get everything from St. John; a future, a salary, all the help they can give, especially when we went to University, they were really flexible, giving us the time to study, to work in the hospital, to do our training, to help me get the certificates, they were really helpful. I really like it. I am not married and I feel that this has given me my life now. When we had to close the clinic in lockdown, I went to work in the main hospital."

Marlene was sponsored by St. John:

"I love travelling. I have been offered hospitality by my sponsors in Norfolk. They are part of St. John and have sponsored me from the beginning since I was a student. He has retired now but is still in contact. They helped me from the start and have invited me even to his house, some special occasions, they are very kind people. It has meant that I can keep working here and helping the people who come to the door, and also those out in the community."

And on Dr. Ahmed Ma'ali...

"He was on the course before me, 1990 to 1992 and I always have this picture of him in the children's ward where he was working and we were coming as students and he was trying to make it easy for us, he was really helpful. He was like our first tutor. He understands, he used to be like us. He knows everybody's job and if I have any issues, I can go to him because he understands. We are very proud to have a Palestinian in charge of the hospital, it also helps us all to think we can be more advanced in our career."

"This has given me my life now."