

## Reducing Health Inequities

The Ben-Gurion University (BGU) Medical School is based in the BGU of the Negev which was established in Beersheva in 1969 with the aim to bring development to the Negev, a desert area comprising more than 60% of Israel.

BGU was inspired by the vision of Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, who believed that the future of the country lay in this region.

Since its establishment BGU has gained recognition for its unique pioneering spirit that combines outstanding academics and research with a commitment to the local community.

It is recognised as a leader in areas such as desert agriculture and water resource management.

The Medical School and Life Sciences are known for their international health, Bedouin medicine, genetics, biotechnology and nanotechnology programmes.

The main teaching base is the Soroka Hospital, but all students spend time in the community from the start of the course.

There are satellite campuses in Eilat and Sede Boqer, where Ben-Gurion lived in his final years and is buried. The Centre for Health Policy Research in the Negev ([chrnegev@gmail.com](mailto:chrnegev@gmail.com)) is based at BGU.

Their recent work is based upon the health disparities that they have identified between the central and peripheral areas of Israel, which they consider to be a major barrier to further general development of the Negev region.



At a recent Mitzpe Ramon Conference, organized by Dr Dopelt and Profs Bin Nun and Davidovitch, data was presented which showed that:

- Physician and nurse rates in the Negev are 2.1 and 3.7 per 1000 population respectively, compared to a national average of 3.3 and 5.1 per 1000.
- Soroka Medical Centre has the highest referral rate to the Accident and Emergency Department of all Israeli hospitals (2006 figures were 195,775) but numbers of staff positions were 50% lower than the national average.
- Community health services (of which the Negev has always been particularly proud!) also suffer from staff shortages, especially of nurses.

The Conference was attended by the BGU President (Prof Carmi); the Director General of the Ministry of Health (Prof Gamsu) and the chair of the Knesset Health Lobby (Dr Adato).

### The main recommendations of the conference were:

- Government needs to recognize reduction of health inequities as a national goal.
- The Faculty of Health Sciences at BGU needs to play a leading role in lobbying for reduction in health inequities.
- There needs to be a national database, including both socio-demographic and health indicators, and arranged on a regional and geographic basis, in order to define locations, standards and targets for future development.
- Working groups on
  - (i) manpower and infrastructure;
  - (ii) regulatory mechanisms and;
  - (iii) public health interventions need to continue to operate so as to guide initiatives and monitor progress.

*Center for Health Policy Research in the Negev*  
[chrnegev@gmail.com](mailto:chrnegev@gmail.com)