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Two Russian women who miraculously survived a catastrophic bus crash are about to be transferred out of the rehabilitation center -- but their battle to recover from their injuries continues. SELAH has been with them from the beginning.



It has been over a year since the horrific accident occurred, where the bus carrying travel agents from Russia crashed on its way from the Uvda Airport to Eilat. This motor vehicle accident, considered the most severe in Israeli history, occurred on December 16, 2008, and took the lives of 24 Russian citizens. Twenty-seven passengers (including two Israelis) were severely injured.

Currently, two women with the most severe injuries, resulting in paralysis, are still in Israel receiving treatment. Svetlana Tikhonova and Marianna Kuzminova are staying at the Reut Rehabilitation Center in Tel Aviv. The expenses for treating and housing the Russians in Israel are covered by the Hachsharat Ha'Yishuv insurance company, which insured the crashed bus.

It was recently learned that the insurance company is considering moving the women to a senior center in Petach Tikva. Svetlana and Marianna's friends asked the editorial staff of NEWSru.co.il to help the women complete their treatment at their current location, but the insurance company, acting in strict accordance with Israel law, claimed that remaining at the rehabilitation center made no sense.

Svetlana Tikhonova is afraid that after moving to Petakh-Tikva, the rehabilitation process will essentially be stopped because training devices available at the senior center are tailored to outpatients only. The insurance company has tried to explain to the Russians that they will receive the care they need in Petach Tikva, as well. However, in a conversation with a NEWSru.co.il reporter, Svetlana reported that to control her back pains she has to move, and a special treatment program was developed for her at Reut. Tikhonova is afraid that she will not be able to work out on training devices at an unspecialized center and then, in order to control her pain, she will have to take medication.

Alex Gershanov, of the Israel Crisis Management Center (SELAH), which provides emergency assistance to immigrants, agrees with Svetlana that the conditions at the senior center are inferior to those at the Reut center. It should be noted that since December 16, 2008, when first reports of the accident came in, SELAH urgently summoned its staff and volunteers. Russian-speaking psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and SELAH volunteers maintained constant bedside vigils, met relatives arriving in Israel, and provided all the required assistance and psychological support. Alex was one of the people who took care of Svetlana and Marianna from the first day, and who continues to care for them to date.

According to Gershanov, who spoke to a NEWSru.co.il reporter: "I have visited the senior center where they are planned to be relocated and can testify that there is no equipment for physiotherapy of wheelchair-bound patients."

As explained by Alex Gershanov, the decision to move the Russians was made by the insurance company based on reports issued by attending physicians. They concluded that the women's health would not improve any further and that staying at the rehabilitation center made no sense. Having received this report, the insurance company decided to move the women to a less expensive place.

However, aside from the fact that there are no conditions for rehabilitation treatment at the senior center, there is one more reason why Svetlana is opposed to moving to another city, and prefers to stay at Reut, even over a more expensive clinic. During the accident, she sustained severe craniofacial traumas, lost her teeth and broke bones in her skull. Facial surgery, including bone implants, is not covered by medical insurance because it is considered "cosmetic surgery." The injured woman's

husband is paying for this part of her treatment. The dental clinic where Svetlana is undergoing her surgeries is located close to the Rehabilitation Center, and Svetlana can be taken there on her wheelchair, without the need for other transport.

"I'm trying to avoid an ambulance because I must be transported in a wheelchair. The ambulance roof is not high enough for me to sit, so I must bend down. Because I suffered a serious neck trauma, somebody needs to help me bend my head, which is very painful. After my last trip in an ambulance, I had to use painkillers for two weeks," Svetlana said.

In order to imbed dental implants, Svetlana must have one more bone implant. This process takes time and during this period, Svetlana would like to live close to the dental clinic where she is undergoing treatment.

The Russians are communicating with the Hachsharat Ha'Yishuv insurance company through their lawyers. The lawyers, in turn, have their own strategy and tactics: They are vehemently opposed to media handling; their clients are not allowed to mention their names and give their location when talking to reporters.

When interviewed by the NEWSru.co.il correspondent, Alex Gershanov mentioned the name of Meir Ben-Zvi, an insurance agent who was dealing with the case of Valentina Fedosova, who was also injured in the accident. After the accident, Israeli surgeons inserted a pin into Valentina's shoulder; Valentina was informed that the pin must be removed in a year. In February of last year, Fedosova returned to Russia, and in the summer, a medical examination in Saint Petersburg revealed that the pin had penetrated her joint. However, as suggested by Russian surgeons, it can only be removed abroad because it was inserted using technology not employed in Russia. This information was submitted by Valentina Fedosova to the insurance company, through her lawyers; according to her, the company refused to pay for an additional operation.

The NEWSru.co.il correspondent contacted Meir Ben-Zvi, the Hachsharat Ha'Yishuv insurance agent in charge of the Valentina Fedosova case. During the conversation, Ben-Zvi took a sincere interest in the health of the Russians injured in the accident. He reported that he still shuddered to think of the tragedy that happened near Eilat. According to him, one year ago, the company went against its own regulations and gave an allowance to all the hospitalized Russians. "All the names you mentioned mean a lot to me. I've personally gotten to know all the people injured in the accident and have visited them in the hospital several times. I wish them a full recovery. But after Fedosova left for Russia, I submitted her case," Ben-Zvi said. He also noted that he is ready to resume this case at any time, but he must be assigned to it by his superiors. According to him, nobody has inquired about the case in recent months.

Therefore, all the parties participating in the fate of the Russians have officially fulfilled their obligations, and no allegations can be made about them. However, the women who were injured in Israel, through no fault of their own, are involved in a very difficult situation with, no operating instructions on how to solve it. The NEWSru.co.il site will continue to follow the course of events.

