**Abstract**

**The Few for the Many: The “Immigrant Medical Services” Organization (SHAREL) during the End of the British Mandate and the First Years of Israel (1944–1953)**

In the years after the Second World War, mass Jewish immigration to British Mandatory Palestine and then the State of Israel occurred on an unprecedented scale. Many of the hundred of thousands of Jews who immigrated had illness or disabilities. This paper discusses the development of two organizations, Immigrant Medical Services (SHAREL) and Malben (a Hebrew acronym for Organization for the Care of Handicapped Immigrants), which provided medical services to these immigrants between 1944-1953. Due to a lack of financial and human resources, both organizations relied on a small team of physicians and nurses. They were assisted by two American Jewish voluntary organizations, Hadassah: The Women’s Zionist Organization of America and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which provided aid for displaced Jews worldwide. These organizations were critical during Israel’s resource-poor first years of independence, facilitating the immigration and settlement of tens of thousands of sick and disabled Jews. Hadassah managed SHAREL, which was tasked with providing medical assistance to all Jewish immigrants, while the JDC managed Malben, which cared for immigrants with disabilities. Israel’s health system was established at this time, and thus medical services for Jewish immigrants were an essential part of the nascent state’s immigrant absorption system. SHAREL and Malben demonstrated great commitment towards the hundreds of thousands of new immigrants who flooded Israel’s shores in the years immediately following its independence. Their work included treating and preventing the spread of deadly diseases like tuberculosis. Israel owes a great deal to these few medical professionals who did all they could to safeguard the health of Jewish immigrants, often through personal innovation and self-sacrifice.

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