

Dr. Eric Bouffet,
Director of the
SickKids Brain
Tumour Program

HE'S LEADING ROUNDS IN UKRAINE. FROM TORONTO.

UKRAINE PAEDIATRIC FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

2020 IMPACT REPORT

SickKids



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VIRTUAL ROUNDS, REAL IMPACT

Dr. Eric Bouffet and his colleagues are leading rounds in Ukraine from their SickKids offices in Toronto

BACK IN JUNE 2019, long before the COVID-19 pandemic swept the globe, Dr. Eric Bouffet was in Kyiv at the Ukraine National Specialized Children's Hospital (Okhmadyt) on a SickKids advisory trip. There, the renowned scientist and Director of the SickKids Brain Tumour Program led case consultations and seminars, much like he had on his previous two trips to Ukraine. But upon talking to Dr. Pavlo Plavskiy, a neurosurgeon and former SickKids observer, Dr. Bouffet realized they had a problem. Patients with brain tumours at the hospital were being misdiagnosed.

"If the diagnosis is wrong, the treatment is wrong," Dr. Bouffet explains.

While troubling, his finding was consistent with the data, which shows that, in less-resourced countries, roughly 40% of paediatric oncology cases are misdiagnosed.

To solve the problem, Dr. Bouffet knew cases needed to be presented to SickKids as early as possible, so they could be part of the decision-making process. His solution? Virtual rounds, where SickKids could advise Ukrainian doctors on the diagnosis and treatment of neuro-oncology cases.

Today, Drs. Bouffet and Jim Rutka (the Ukrainian Paediatric Fellowship Program's Co-Director) run an hour-long Zoom teleconference roughly once a month with up to 50 doctors from Ukraine.

"The impact of the program has been spectacular," Dr. Bouffet says. "We can see that the quality of care in Ukraine has increased."

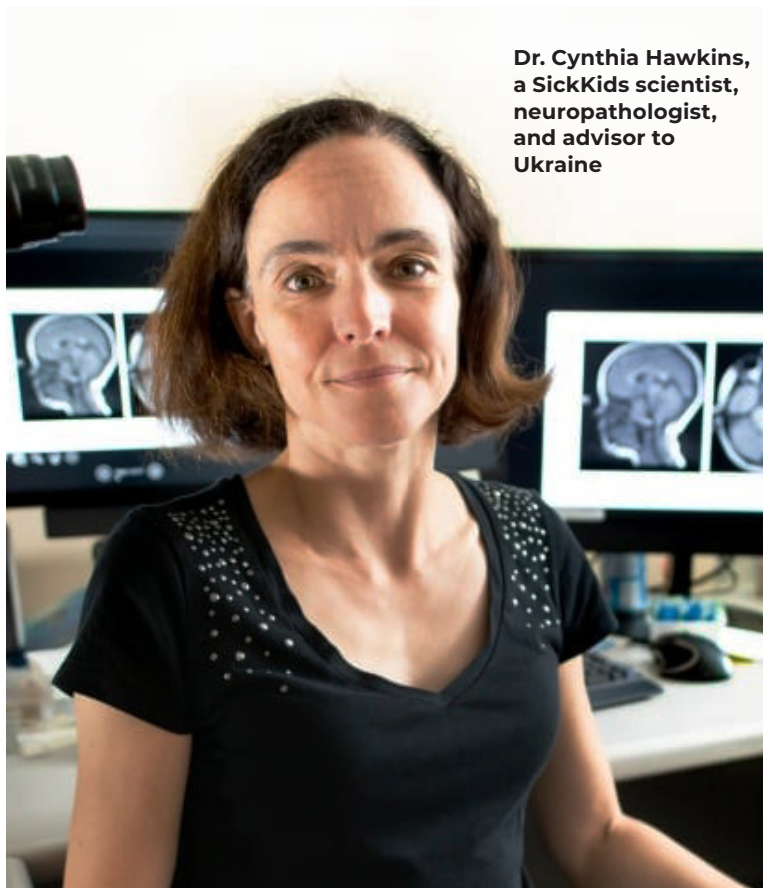
While the program is based in Okhmadyt, the virtual rounds bring together doctors from all across the country. Some participate and present cases, while others just listen and learn.

Drs. Bouffet and Rutka have also recruited new SickKids experts to the cause, including Dr. Uri Tabori, a researcher and paediatric oncologist, and Dr. Cynthia Hawkins, a scientist and neuropathologist. "She's really a critical component of this collaboration, because she's the one reviewing the pathology samples for many of the patients," Dr. Bouffet says.

While Drs. Bouffet and Rutka have been leading neuro-oncology rounds, SickKids neurologist Dr. Tina Go has been leading virtual epilepsy rounds with Ukrainian neurologists—another big boon to the program.

For Dr. Bouffet, virtual rounds are a compliment to the annual advisory trips, not a substitute. "When we go to Ukraine, we can discuss how to implement changes based on what we learned with these teleconferences," he says.

Because of COVID-19, those advisory trips—as well as all our observerships at SickKids—must remain on hold. But the virtual rounds will continue, probably for years to come. And although the delivery is digital, the impact is very real.

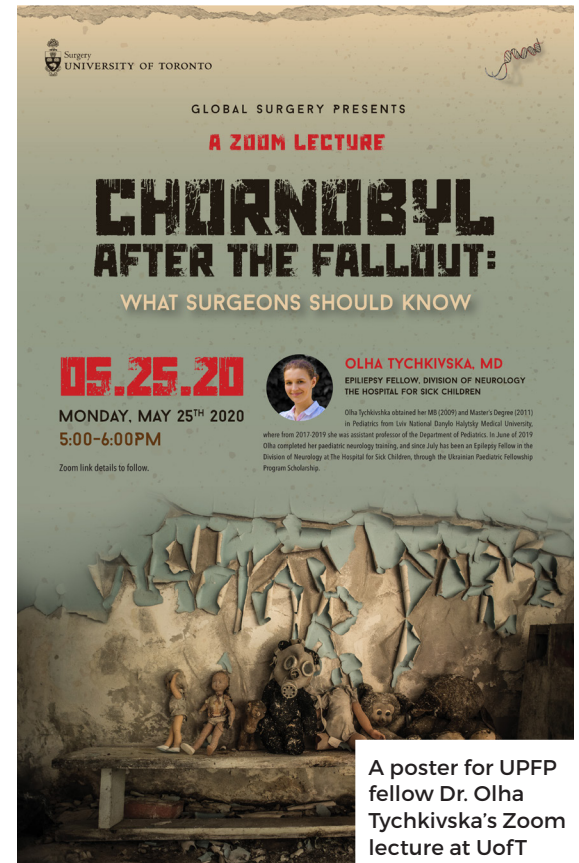


Dr. Cynthia Hawkins, a SickKids scientist, neuropathologist, and advisor to Ukraine

OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

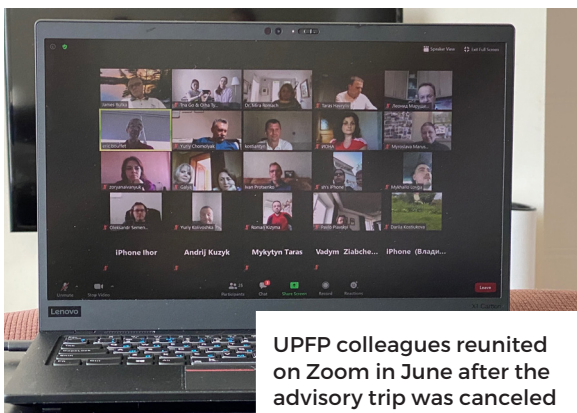
Even amidst a global pandemic, we made major progress over the last year. Here are just a few of the highlights:

- In November, 2019, Dr. Christopher Tomlinson, a SickKids neonatologist with expertise in growth and nutrition, led an advisory trip to Ukraine. There, he gave talks at a conference of international speakers on managing premature babies, plus led seminars and case consultations at Okhmatdyt, where he spent much of his time advising doctors in the neonatal intensive care unit.
- The SickKids Neurology department was so impressed with current UPFP fellow Dr. Olha Tychkivska that they paid to extend her fellowship by a full year, which Dr. Romach described as “previously unheard of.” Dr. Tychkivska also delivered a much-praised lecture on the effects of the Chernobyl disaster, once to the SickKids Neurology department and again at the University of Toronto.
- With a generous boost from the Children of Chernobyl Canadian Fund, we were able to support Dr. Christina Peters, an oncologist from St. Anna’s Children’s Hospital in Vienna, in training some of the Stem Cell Transplant Unit staff at Okhmatdyt. Now, the hospital is performing bone marrow transplants using non family-related donors—a massive leap forward. That’s because when you no longer need a family member match, the donor pool expands, so far more children are eligible for transplants and no longer need to leave Ukraine for treatment.



A poster for UPFP fellow Dr. Olha Tychkivska's Zoom lecture at UofT

RESPONDING TO COVID-19



UPFP colleagues reunited on Zoom in June after the advisory trip was canceled

From canceled surgeries to stringent new protocols, the COVID-19 pandemic has had serious consequences on SickKids—and the Ukraine Paediatric Fellowship Program (UPFP) is no exception.

In April, we were expecting two new observers, both of whom had to postpone their trips. In June, we were planning to lead a new advisory trip (our 12th) with Dr. Cynthia Hawkins, as well as some of our top clinicians and psychiatrists. That too was canceled.

“It was a huge disappointment,” says Dr. Romach, adding that they had also planned to visit Mariupol, a city in Eastern Ukraine on the edge of the Sea of Azov, which had been asking for our expertise.

While unable to meet in person, UPFP colleagues across Canada and Ukraine reunited with Drs. Romach and Rutka in June on Zoom, where they shared personal stories about coping with COVID-19. “Although it was not as good as meeting in person, it was the next best thing under the circumstances,” says Dr. Rutka. “We concluded with a toast to the Ukraine Pediatric Fellowship Program.”

There have been other innovative responses to the pandemic, too. In March, Ukraine was in desperate need of evidence-based guidelines for managing patients with COVID-19. Some had been written by the World Health Organization, Harvard Medical School, and SickKids, but there was no Ukrainian translation. So, Dr. Romach corralled UPFP fellow Dr. Tychkivska and several alumni to translate them. Which they did, over a single long weekend, creating a document that would make it all the way to the Ukrainian Ministry of Health.

THANK YOU.

Every day, SickKids works towards improving the lives of children, and our success depends on the generosity of donors like you. Your commitment to the Ukraine Paediatric Fellowship Program ensures that we can continue to offer the best possible outcomes for children in Ukraine, so they can live longer, healthier lives.

Thank you for your remarkable generosity.



For more information, please contact:

Ulana Bochnewicz
Associate Director, Major Gifts

SickKids Foundation
525 University Avenue, 8th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2L3

PHONE 416-572-1665 **FAX** 416.813.5024
Ulana.Bochnewicz@sickkidsfoundation.com

sickkidsfoundation.com



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