

PROFILES IN PROGRESS:

Drs. Taras Mykytyn & Ihor Humeniuk



Dr. Taras Mykytyn, Dr. James Rutka, Dr. Ihor Humeniuk and team performing the first vagal nerve stimulator implantation in Western Ukraine.

Drs. Taras Mykytyn and Ihor Humeniuk, driven young surgeons, have been busy building the paediatric neurosurgical unit in Lviv. They have both completed observerships at SickKids and trained in new surgical procedures under the mentorship of Dr. James Rutka.

Now, they perform procedures on kids in Lviv—from epilepsy surgery to brain tumour removal—for which patients used to have to travel to Kyiv. On the June 2018 advisory trip, Dr. James Rutka trained them in implanting Vagal Nerve Stimulators in patients with medication-resistant epilepsy, another first in Western Ukraine.

Thanks to a generous gift from the Temerty Foundation, the paediatric neurosurgical unit in Lviv now has modern equipment, enabling advanced treatment. Since this investment, there have been countless epilepsy and brain tumour operations, and the unit has grown into a centre of excellence for paediatric neurosurgery.

Dr. Yuriy Kolivoshka

Two years after completing his observership, Dr. Yuriy Kolivoshka returned to SickKids in 2016 for an 18-month surgical fellowship in the neonatal intensive care unit. There, he learned “the intricate details of complex surgeries,” many of which aren’t taught in Ukraine.

Today, he’s back home, using the skills he learned at SickKids to save—and transform—patients’ lives. One of those patients is Mariya,* a teenage girl born with spina bifida, a neural tube birth defect that left her incontinent. But thanks to Dr. Kolivoshka and fellow team members, who performed Ukraine’s first-ever continence procedure on her, Mariya is now a regular teenage girl. She sings in a choir and spends her summers at a camp in the mountains.

*The patient’s named has been changed to protect her identity.

PROJECT MILESTONES

2013

The Ukraine Paediatric Fellowship Program is founded. During the first advisory visit, SickKids staff meet with physicians and administrators from many children’s hospitals. The first Ukrainian physicians arrive at SickKids for their observerships.

2014

On their September advisory trip, SickKids donates a neurosurgical endoscope to Lviv City Children’s Clinical Hospital to perform minimally invasive procedures.

2015

The Program expands to include neonatal care and maternal & child mental health.

2016

SickKids President Dr. Mike Apkon hosts Dr. Dymtro Kvit, Lviv City Children’s Clinical Hospital’s Physician-in-Chief, for a week-long visit to learn hospital administration and emergency medicine best practices.

2017

Dr. Kolivoshka completes his intensive 18-month fellowship at SickKids.

SEPTEMBER, 2018

After years of lobbying led by former SickKids observer Dr. Olha Tychkivska and colleagues, Ukrainian parliament approves a law mandating flour fortification with folate, saving countless future children from the scourge of neural tube defects.

OCTOBER, 2018

Children of Chernobyl Canadian Fund donates \$800,000 to the Program, which will help establish a new training program at the National Specialized Children’s Hospital in Kyiv.

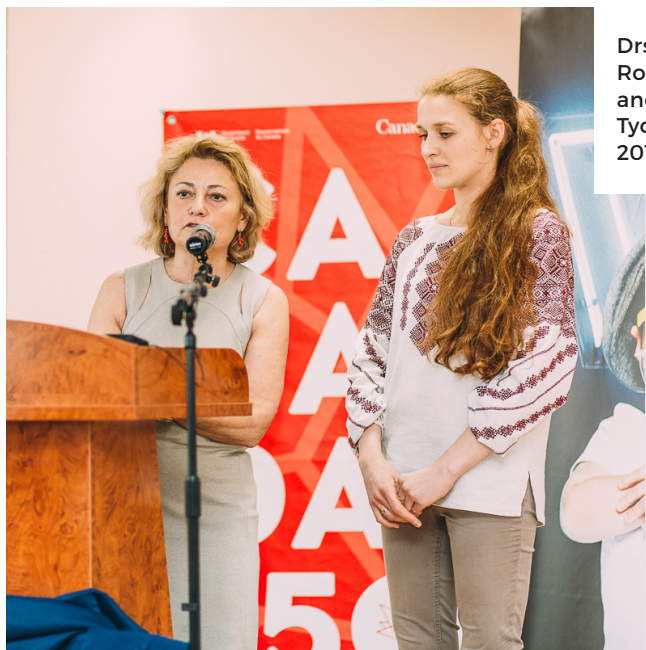
LIFESAVING LOBBYING

How a simple policy change will transform Ukrainian child health

Children born with neural tube defects often face a lifetime of suffering or die before taking their first steps. Those born with spina bifida, one of the most common neural tube defects, suffer from difficulty walking and controlling their bowel and bladder. Those born with anencephaly are missing a large chunk of their brain and rarely live longer than a few days. And in Ukraine, the prevalence of neural tube defects is believed to be almost 2.2 per 1,000 live births—twice as high as the European Union average.

But this severe problem has a simple solution: mandating flour fortification with folate. Fortifying flour with folate has already proven to significantly reduce the incidence of neural tube defects, which is why mandatory fortification is the law in over 80 countries. However, Ukraine, a major grain producer, only fortifies flour made for export, not domestic consumption.

But in September 2018, after years of lobbying led by former SickKids observer and soon-to-be fellow Dr. Olha Tychkivska and her colleagues, the Ukrainian parliament finally passed a law mandating flour fortification. Once it takes effect in 2020, this new law will ease the burden on Ukraine's strained healthcare system—and save countless children from death and needless suffering.



Drs. Myroslava Romach and Olha Tychkivska in 2017

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