



UKRAINE PAEDIATRIC FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

2022 PROGRESS REPORT



DR. ZORYANA IVANYUK



DR. MYROSLAVA ROMACH'S MISSION TO DELIVER EQUIPMENT

SINCE 2012, SickKids has formed strong relationships with doctors in Ukraine specializing in brain disorders. This has led to effective and rewarding collaborations. Over the years, specialized medical equipment has been donated to children's hospitals in Ukraine to support our colleagues in providing up-to-date interventions for children facing disorders such as epilepsy, brain tumours, congenital abnormalities, anxiety and depression.

While virtual communication is productive and was necessary during the first outbreaks of COVID-19, it cannot replicate the powerful dynamics that transpire during in-person interactions. The Ukraine Paediatric Fellowship Program (UPFP) team planned a visit to Ukraine in June 2022 after a prolonged absence. Advanced medical equipment was purchased to be given to Ukrainian hospitals, but the war broke out on February 24, 2022, necessitating a change in plans.

Sending resources from Canada was very challenging but Dr. Myroslava Romach, a Professor of Psychiatry and Surgery at the University of Toronto and a Co-director of the UPFP, refused

to give up her pursuit of delivering equipment to Ukraine. Dr. Romach was introduced to the Canadian Medical Assistance Teams (CMAT), a disaster relief organization that consists of medical volunteers from across Canada. One of the co-founders and directors of CMAT, Valerie Rzepka, became interested in forming mission teams to deploy and provide care to refugees and internally displaced people in Ukraine. By March 2022, Valerie and her colleagues had quickly organized rotating teams of physicians, psychologists, nurses and nurse practitioners from across Canada to travel to Poland and western Ukraine to offer medical care. In June 2022, Dr. Romach joined the CMAT team on one of their missions.

While working with the CMAT team, Dr. Romach hoped to bring the medical equipment and needed medications to a UPFP collaborating children's hospital in Lviv, now called St. Nicholas Children's Hospital. She was unable to find a shipper in Canada willing to take this cargo but with Valerie's help, the Polish airline LOT agreed to ship the 400 lbs of equipment and drugs without charge. Once in Warsaw, the equipment was first transported to Chelm (Kholm) for storage in a Polish aid worker's home. Then, Valerie and Dr. Romach packed the boxes into a rental car and travelled to a border crossing. They drove to Lviv to deliver a neuro-navigational system for neurosurgery, a video-EEG monitoring system for diagnosing epilepsy, and medications including anti-epileptic drugs, antibiotics and analgesics, all worth over \$325,000.

“When our CMAT team first arrived in Ukraine, we were advised to download a smartphone app that would notify us when and where air raid sirens were sounding in Ukraine, especially in the areas we were travelling in. That app is still active on my phone; its frequent notifications remind me of what Ukrainians are having to endure every day.”

– Dr. Myroslava Romach



Drs. Taras Mykytyn and Mykhailo Loyha with Dr. Romach

PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH WAR TRAUMA

With the war approaching its first anniversary, the need for psychiatric services is overwhelming, especially for children and people who have sustained major physical trauma. Ukrainian professionals are responding and providing care, but they require more support and training. Trauma, especially to limbs, has led to many amputations. Some of these amputations may have been prevented or better managed with more resources and training. Prosthetics are desperately needed. Dr. Romach and her SickKids colleagues are currently working to bring orthopedic, psychiatric and rehabilitation medicine specialists to Ukraine as well as physician observers from Ukraine to Toronto for training to build capacity in rehabilitative medicine for children with war trauma.

FOLIC ACID FORTIFICATION UPDATE

AS YOU MAY REMEMBER, advocacy work was being done in Ukraine to convince the government to bring in mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid, as it is necessary to prevent children from being born with spina bifida, a disabling congenital abnormality. Ukraine has the highest rate in Europe of these abnormalities, which are either lethal or permanently disabling. In 2019 a law in favour of fortification for domestic consumption was finally written and had its first reading in Ukraine's Parliament. However, with the formation of a new government, the law was never adopted and was eventually abandoned.

In collaboration with the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, the Canadian Ambassador to Ukraine, and Dr. Olha Tychkivska, former UPFP fellow, and her colleagues, the advocacy campaign for folate fortification of flour in Ukraine was renewed. The Cabinet of Ministers, the Ministry of Health, the Parliamentary Committee for Health as well as members of Parliament were being encouraged to push through the necessary legislation.

There was good progress: a new law was written and had its first reading in parliament. The Parliamentary Health Committee was discussing this matter but when Ukraine was attacked, everything came to a halt. We hope that this important matter will be revisited when the country starts to rebuild from the war.

UPDATE FROM PAST UPFP FELLOW DR. ZORYANA IVANYUK, MEDICAL DIRECTOR AT THE HOSPITAL OF SAINT NICHOLAS

“**RIGHT NOW**, we are trying to live a normal life, but it is not easy. A lot of plans were ruined, but we are still here for our patients. Children from all over Ukraine are coming to our hospital. Injured, sick, without anything. And every story is a tragedy. Our team is learning to work not only as doctors, but also animators, teachers, psychologists, social workers, nurses, and everything in between.

Hospitals in the east and south of the country are not working in their usual way. Children with complex needs are looking for doctors somewhere else. Lviv is one of the safest places in Ukraine right now and we need to help our kids here. Every kid deserves equal opportunity.”

WHAT'S NEXT

We hope to be able to make a mission visit to Ukraine as soon as it is safe to do so, to support our Ukrainian fellow physicians and help foster multidisciplinary teams of care for children. Many resources will be required to rebuild Ukraine's health care sector after the devastation wrought by Russia's attacks.

PAST FELLOW SPOTLIGHT: DR. ROMAN KIZYMA

DR. KIZYMA was born into a family of doctors, and from a young age, wanted to follow in his mother's footsteps. She is one of the pioneers of pediatric oncology in Ukraine and this inspired him to take the same path.

In 2014, Dr. Kizyma came to SickKids as a UPFP fellow. After his fellowship, he began to widely implement International Society of Paediatric Oncology and Children's Oncology Group guidelines into his hospital's standards and began to take part in international clinical trials as an investigator. He helped set up the first donor registry for bone marrow transplants in Ukraine. Currently, he works at the West Ukrainian Specialized Pediatric Medical Centre where he is the Director of the newly created Bone Marrow Transplant Unit.

With the horrific situation in Ukraine, children with cancer with complex needs are unable to receive the care they need. That is why Dr. Kizyma created an evacuation operation to transfer over 500 children for ongoing treatment to hospitals in Europe and North America. UPFP worked with Dr. Kizyma, St. Jude's Hospital in Memphis and our Ukrainian colleagues to help evacuate nine children with cancer and their families in March 2022 and bring them to SickKids for further specialized care. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky has applauded Dr. Kizyma's incredibly important work.

THANK YOU.

Every day, SickKids works toward improving the lives of children, and our success depends on the generosity of remarkable 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 continued generosity.



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