

**THEY LEARN.  
KIDS LIVE.**

**Ukraine Paediatric Fellowship Program**

**5th Anniversary Impact Report**

**2013-2018**

**SickKids**

**VS**

**Boundaries**

# CELEBRATING OUR HISTORY

In Kharkiv in 2017, at the Congress of the Ukrainian Association of Neurosurgeons, doctors from across the country listened as Dr. Myroslava Romach spoke about preventing neural tube defects, an often-fatal birth defect far too common in Ukraine.

In Lviv City Children’s Clinical Hospital that same year, 12 Ukrainian neurosurgeons watched, via a video monitor on a newly acquired operating microscope, as Dr. James Rutka, working with Dr. Taras Mykytyn and his team, performed highly complex brain surgery.

In Toronto’s SickKids hospital in 2018, Kyiv’s Dr. Leonid Maruschenko followed esteemed surgeons from their morning rounds to the operating room, where they saved a child from a lifetime of incessant seizures.

For five years, the Ukraine Paediatric Fellowship Program has made moments like this possible, and that’s all thanks to you: our champions of child health in the Ukrainian-Canadian community. Founded in 2013 through a partnership between Children of Chernobyl Canadian Fund, Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and SickKids, the Program trains health-care specialists and improves paediatric care so Ukrainian children can lead long, healthy lives. It does so through observerships at SickKids, where Ukrainian fellows can shadow world-renowned Canadian doctors, and advisory visits to Ukraine,



Dr. Yuriy Kolivoskha, Dr. James Rutka, and Dr. Taras Mykytyn reviewing a patient case.



In 2013, Dr. Taras Mykytyn and Dr. James Rutka performed lifesaving brain surgery on little Anastasija. In 2017, she joined them for a celebration of the Ukraine Paediatric Fellowship Program.

where SickKids specialists offer clinical consultations, surgical guidance and educational sessions. What began as a neurosurgery initiative in 2013 has since grown to become a comprehensive brain health program, including neurology, neonatology, and psychiatry.

Thus far, the results have been extraordinary. With our partners, we’ve introduced new surgical procedures, patient care practices, and team-based approaches. We’ve consulted on hundreds of cases and lectured to hundreds of doctors. We’ve bought critical equipment for children’s hospitals and advised on procedures and protocols. We’ve helped save kids’ lives.

But our work isn’t just about today—it’s about the future, a Ukraine where all children can access world-class paediatric care.

And to build that future, we need your help.



We have visited seven cities in Ukraine.

## 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

Western Ukraine Centre of Excellence for Neurosurgery opens in Lviv thanks to the generous support of the Temerty Foundation.

### 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.

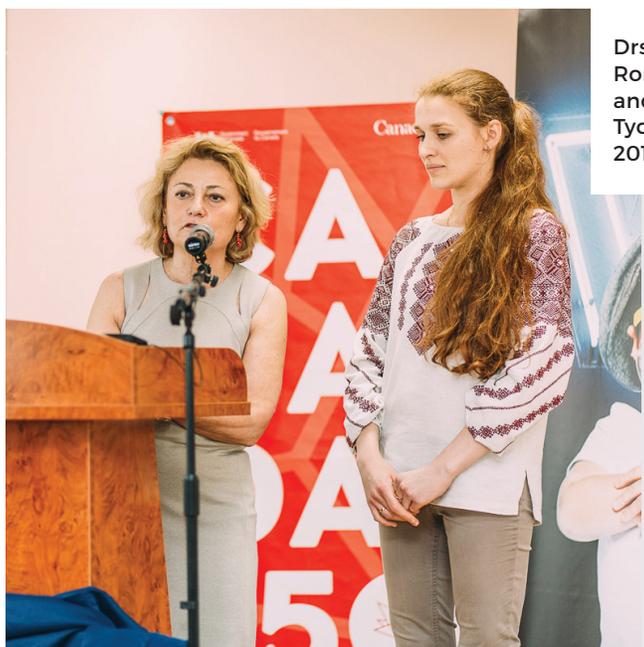
## LIFESAVING LOBBYING

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 the 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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## CHARTING OUR FUTURE

### What's next for the Ukraine Paediatric Fellowship Program

For far too long, Ukrainian paediatric care languished under a post-Soviet system stymied by endemic corruption and severe inefficiency. Children's hospitals suffered the most. Doctors were embroiled in bribes and kickback schemes, and the government lacked the will—and leadership—to act.

But things are starting to change. Dr. Ulana Suprun, Ukraine's Acting Minister of Health, is on a crusade to revolutionize the health system, and although she faces serious opposition, her policies are widely supported. For SickKids and the Ukraine Paediatric Fellowship Program, that means more opportunities to help reform paediatric care.

In fact, Minister Suprun was so impressed by our work that she invited SickKids to conduct a formal needs assessment at the National Specialized Children's Hospital in Kyiv, known to locals as Okhmatdyt. Led by Dr. Myroslava Romach, the Ukraine Paediatric Fellowship Program's Medical Director, the SickKids team suggested ways to improve administration, safety, and patient care and "position the hospital as a future model of excellence

for the broader healthcare system."

With this needs assessment and five years of great work behind it, including partnerships with dozens of doctors and hospitals, the Program is perfectly positioned to grow its influence. Building on our commended advisory visits and observerships, our plan is to expand into cancer care and performance measuring, which will help monitor and improve patient outcomes.

The centrepiece of the next phase, enabled by an \$800,000 catalyst gift from the Children of Chernobyl Canadian Fund, is a new partnership with Okhmatdyt. In providing a robust, specialized training program at Okhmatdyt, SickKids staff will bring their expertise where it's needed most, helping transform paediatric care for generations.

With continued investments from the Ukrainian-Canadian community, we will continue to build on this partnership, identifying new opportunities and ways to improve child health in Ukraine.

# THANK YOU

Every day, SickKids is working 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 at SickKids ensures that we can continue to offer the best possible health outcomes for children around the world so they can live longer and healthier lives. Thank you for your remarkable generosity.



SickKids **VS** Limits

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
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