

Heal Ukraine Group

October 2023 Newsletter



In Collaboration
with:



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Despite dwindling coverage in mainstream media, the war in Ukraine continues to devastate the country. Air and artillery strikes rain over the Eastern frontlines, falling on Huzar, a small village where more than a fifth of the residents died in a single missile attack. Four months after the destruction of Ukraine's dam, Kakhovka, 700,000 Ukrainians face water shortages as they rebuild homes and farmland ruined from the explosion. International support must continue as Ukrainians display resistance to Russia's violence and barbaric crimes on humanity.

The Heal Ukraine Group ([HUG](#)) is a coalition of Boston-based healthcare professionals working to provide critically needed medical supplies, lifesaving intervention, and education directly and accountably, where resources are needed, including where rubble is being dismantled and the search and treatment of survivors continues. We emphasize evidence-based practices and assure accountability in our processes.

In collaboration with the 501(c)(3) non-profit organization Global Medical Knowledge Alliance ([GMKA](#)), critically needed medical supplies and equipment are procured and delivered to our Ukrainian colleagues on the frontlines. To date, the Heal Ukraine Group (HUG) has supplied tens of thousands of lifesaving surgical materials and medical equipment, ranging from portable ultrasounds, cardiac monitors, and mechanical ventilators to wound vacuum therapy units, boxes of surgical staples and sutures, and surgical headlamps. HUG works with sponsors and partners in Boston and is grateful for prior support from the outstanding team at Lake Country Medical Aid to Ukraine ([LCMAU](#)) in Georgia led by Dr. Nicolas Chronos and Ralph Olson.

HUG's imperative remains to sustain Ukraine's healthcare delivery as best as possible to conserve the provision of proper medical services for Ukrainians during the war. For as long as the war persists, our support remains for Ukrainians as they push ever forward in resistance.

Our work, detailed below cannot be completed without the full and generous support of philanthropy.

Please join us in support of Ukraine as the country faces an ongoing healthcare crisis.



Individual stories highlighting accomplishments of the HUG team may be found below. The faces of Ukrainian patients and healthcare workers are blurred to protect their identities at this time of war.

Updates on the EMDR Training in Ukraine

In an effort to address the mounting mental health demand for the people of Ukraine, both military and civilian, HUG is supporting scholarships to train eight psychotherapists via the EMDR program and curriculum designed by Oksana Nakonechna and her colleagues from EMDR Ukraine. For background, EMDR is an evidence-based psychotherapeutic practice used to treat trauma-related conditions like post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) through bilateral stimulation, wherein the traumatic memory is accessed and reprocessed with new adaptive beliefs. The eight practitioners have completed the training and are actively treating patients using this mode of therapy.

Please find reflections below from the scholarship recipients who participated in the training.

“Thank you for the opportunity to study on this project. I can now work with people who have suffered traumatic experiences through a truly evidence-based method of psychotherapy. Unfortunately, the request for work with trauma is now very relevant in Ukraine due to the invasion of Russia. I assume that the need for trauma therapy will be around for a long time. [Now] I have the opportunity to provide quality services to those in need of the EMDR method.

I am glad to be in a friendly environment of professional colleagues with whom I had the opportunity to meet and exchange experiences and wise, humane teachers and supervisors who provided quality knowledge, support and help to me - a specialist who is at the beginning of the path of trauma therapy.

This is a precious experience, and I intend to continue to develop myself in this area.”

- Olena Solonyna



Pictured above are the practitioners who participated in the EMDR team with Karsten Böhm (middle) and Oksana Nakonechna (left), who lead the EMDR training program.

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart for the training! I am currently using EMDR therapy with the military, clients and patients in my clinic.

During the training, the trainer said: "All human beings have maladaptive information in their memory networks, no matter how strong or weak you are." When a person comes to a therapist and something bothers him or her, it is difficult, hard, and sometimes there are terrible feelings. The therapist is expected to help them feel better and it is with the help of EMDR therapy that a client can feel changes much faster than in conventional psychotherapy.

During the training, we learned the difference between PTSD and complex PTSD. Now, It is more clear which therapy plan is most appropriate to use depending on the patient. For example, for a military man where a recent situation has occurred, we work on it because it carries an emotional burden and disturbs the client. With complex trauma, more preparation is needed. You need to move slowly and be careful. In addition, it was valuable to learn that there are two types of dissociation- dissociation as a symptom and dissociation in the memory network.

I use the new knowledge in my practice and feel the value of this method in different situations. I worked with phantom pains, cancer patients, war veterans and complex PTSD. EMDR therapy is unique in that it can help a person process various traumatic memories much faster and is effective in a variety of situations including chronic pain, phantom pain, and OCD.

I am sincerely grateful for the training! Thanks to everyone involved in this project for the opportunity to gain this knowledge.”

- Iryna Kovalyszyn

Updates on the EMDR Training in Ukraine Continued

“It's hard to overvalue the relevance of studying trauma therapy in my country nowadays, especially EMDR. I work as a psychotherapist with different categories of people, including the military, their relatives, and people forced to move from their native cities by this terrifying war. So, I feel a significant need to use EMDR to be helpful.

It was a great experience and pleasure to gain knowledge from professionals like Karsten Böhm and Oksana Nakonechna.

Both the theoretical and practical parts, the support of trainers to give the information in the best way for us and being helpful while we used EMDR our very first times - I greatly appreciate this experience and feel grateful.

Thanks for this opportunity!”

- Nadia Roshchupkina



“Many and sincere thanks to the sponsors of my EMDR training!

This is my second psychotherapeutic education, driven by the urgent need to work with psychological trauma caused by war. I work with soldiers and their families, as well as with family members of the dead and missing, and those who were in captivity. This is a problematic traumatic material to process.

After completing my training, from the last session in early August 2023 to October 1, I conducted 195 sessions, including 59 EMDR sessions, at our Center for the Provision of Services in Lviv. Over the course of 2 months, 5 soldiers received psychotherapeutic help using this method (23 sessions with PTSD symptoms), one wife and two children of soldiers (21 sessions with symptoms of codependency, panic attacks and depression), one widow (8 sessions of bereavement processing) and one volunteer (5 sessions with symptoms of panic attacks).

Given the large number of clients seeking psychological help, especially in the context of the ongoing war, it is essential to have an effective and clearly structured method of psychotherapy for trauma processing.

I am also attaching a couple of photos of grateful clients.

Thank you! Everything will be for Ukraine!”

- Sister Anisiya, psychologist of the LCNCCFD



Sister Anisiya, who participated in the EMDR training program, is pictured using EMDR psychotherapy to treat clients with trauma and trauma-related mental disorders.



Research Projects to Address Mental Health in Ukraine

Russia's deliberate targeting and destruction of healthcare infrastructure has greatly reduced the capacity for medical professionals to provide essential healthcare services for Ukraine as the country faces a growing humanitarian and healthcare crisis. Through deliberative and collaborative measures, HUG aims to develop the programming to enhance and expand the delivery of medical care throughout the country now and for decades beyond this senseless war.

Over the course of the next few years, HUG member Dr. Kimberly Hook, a clinical psychologist and Research Scientist at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, will conduct two research projects to address the need for improving access to evidence-based mental health care for Ukrainians. With partners from Boston University, the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (Ukraine), and the Alliance for Public Health (Ukraine), the first project aims to prevent mental health disorders among internally displaced women in Ukraine. Her team will adapt Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), an evidence-based approach previously seen to improve health behaviors among disadvantaged populations in Eastern Europe. Displaced women recruited into the study will participate in a single-session ACT group intervention that will aim to limit progression of depression and anxiety symptoms. Positive results from this project could result in improved capacity to prevent at scale the development of mental disorders among displaced women in Ukraine.

The second project addresses the growing mental health crisis affecting people with HIV (PWH). From 2010 to 2020, Eastern Europe reported a 72% increase in new adult HIV infections and among the region, the HIV epidemic in Ukraine is one of the largest. There are concerns that the war will increase HIV incidence rates and decrease adherence to antiretroviral therapy (ART), while also exacerbating mental health conditions. This study will implement an adapted psychological intervention, the Common Elements Treatment Approach (CETA), in HIV clinics in Ukraine and will evaluate mental health and HIV outcomes among participants. Dr. Hook's partners at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy have previously demonstrated that CETA is effective in treating mental health disorders in Ukraine, and there is hope that CETA may be similarly effective in other clinical care settings. Through minimizing adverse effects from impaired mental health on HIV outcomes and creating a pathway to increase access to evidence-based mental healthcare in the country, Dr. Hook aims to address a critical public health need not only in Ukraine but throughout Eastern Europe. In the midst of this conflict, we must incorporate the best practices to provide affordable and high-quality health care services and medical interventions that are evidence- and science-based, culturally appropriate, and comprehensive to address these challenges.

Scholars at Risk

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Harvard-HUG SAR: Dr. Olha Kostenchak-Svystak

Dr. Olha Kostenchak-Svystak, a Ukrainian hematologist, has just finished up her one month observership at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH). Under the mentorship of Dr. Thomas Spitzer, Dr. Kostenchak-Svystak learned of the leading-edge strategies for autologous and allogeneic bone marrow and peripheral blood stem cell transplantation as coordinated under the Bone Marrow Transplant (BMT) program at MGH. Even more, Dr. Kostenchak-Svystak learned of the additional resources and healthcare services provided in the U.S. that enhance quality of life for patients, including spiritual support in the hospital, mental health services, and physical therapists. She emphasized her hope to establish similar resources in Ukraine after seeing the benefits of these types of support systems.

Now, back in Ukraine, Dr. Kostenchak-Svystak will share the insights gained from her observership with her colleagues and work to implement a similar BMT program at her hospital, which would be first of its kind in the country.



Pictured above is Dr. Olha Kostenchak-Svystak with her host family at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.



As proven through the cardiac monitors kindly donated and delivered to Ukraine within a week of the request, HUG recognizes how professional and personal networks can facilitate the efficient procurement and delivery of urgently needed supplies. **With this, we share below an up-to-date list of the most requested and currently needed supplies in hopes to receive as in-kind donations:**

- **Defibrillators**
- **Cardiac monitors (as many as possible)**
- **Otosopes**
- **ECG machines**
- **Rapid Infusers (x2 stationary, x1 for evacuation vehicle) and Disposable kits**

Please contact us at info@healukrainegroup.org if you have an item available to donate.

We are grateful for the many contributions donated through the Art Auction Gala, Colors of Peace exhibit, Pavlo Gintov, and Lake Country Aid Concert fundraisers.

Thank you for considering a donation:

<https://www.gofundme.com/>



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