

# Heal Ukraine Group

July 2023 Newsletter



In Collaboration  
with:



Newsletter designed, written and compiled by Yasmina Berkat in collaboration with Drs. Poznansky, Hart, Melnitchouk and Serbyn.

Over 146 residential buildings have been damaged in Odessa as the southern port city endures a series of airstrikes from Russian forces, and today, as morning Mass is held in front of caution tape at a heavily damaged cathedral, citizens hear more warnings of strikes from Ukrainian authorities.

Russia continues its ruthless war and heinous attacks targeting civilian life and infrastructure, and despite ongoing fatigue from a relentless war, Ukraine remains resilient, working to address immediate health challenges and humanitarian needs.

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, to the frontlines (where rubble is dismantled) and the search and treatment of survivors continues.

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 with the outstanding team at Lake Country Medical Aid to Ukraine ([LCMAU](#)), a non-profit organization in Georgia led by Dr. Nicolas Chronos and Ralph Olson, that has raised and dispersed significant funds to support these directed and validated medical relief efforts.

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 a growing 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.*



## Repairing a Center to Support Children with Autism

In addition to the 224 laptops sent to autism specialty centers in Ukraine to support needed mental health services for children with autism, Autism Unity is funding the repair of the Center for Development and Socialization for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Other Mental Disorders. The project involves repairing floor and walls with new installation of lights and protective roller blinds that defend against shelling. The small center is where the NGO United Hearts Foundation holds inclusive events such as workshops and a variety of fun and intermissive activities for children of the organization to improve cognitive abilities and fine motor skills. Previous sports activities have fostered the learning of mindful control of the body and improve social skills from working in a group, and with creative classes, children increase self-expression and develop fine hand motor skills. Below the center shares their sincerity for the donations: “ми безмежно вдячні всій команді Благодійного фонду Autism Unity за підтримку нашого проєкту, за турботу про українських дітей з аутизмом та допомогу у створенні належних умов їхнього розвитку та соціалізації. Ваша допомога важлива для Нас, а особливо в такий важкий для нашої країни час.”

“We are very grateful to the whole team of the Charity Foundation Autism Unity for supporting our project, for caring about Ukrainian children with autism and for helping create the right conditions for their development and socialization. Your help is important for us, and especially in such a difficult time for our country.”



## Dr. Inesa Huivaniuk and Her Efforts Back in Ukraine

Dr. Inesa Huivaniuk is a surgical oncologist from Ukraine and a clinical scholar of the Harvard-HUG Medical SAR program. She was here in Boston for three months observing cases in the department of Gastrointestinal and General Surgery at Brigham & Women's Hospital (BWH). In addition to gaining new in-depth clinical knowledge, including the pre- and post-treatment management of colorectal patients and complex surgical procedures like hepatopancreatobiliary and cytoreductive surgeries, Dr. Huivaniuk learned of the importance of quality improvement and how leading hospitals in Boston are committed to continuous improvement, standardization and efficient organization, all for improved medical care and delivery. Now, back in Ukraine, Dr. Huivaniuk is leading a one year pilot project with her team to implement the elements of quality improvement she observed while in Boston. The project is supported by networks she gained in the US, including Global Medical Knowledge Alliance (GMKA), John Hopkins Medicine, Harvard Medical School, and the Massachusetts General Brigham network. Main elements of focus are to standardize perioperative management in colorectal surgery, conduct regular clinical analysis of medical complications and lethality of previous cases, improve data collection and develop educational materials for patients.

Thank you to Dr. Ronald Bleday and Dr. Carlos Fernandez-del Castillo for their mentorship and kind guidance to Dr. Huivaniuk.



*Dr. Fernandez-del Castillo (right) with Dr. Huivaniuk (center) and his team at BWH.*



## Addressing the Psychological Wounds of the War

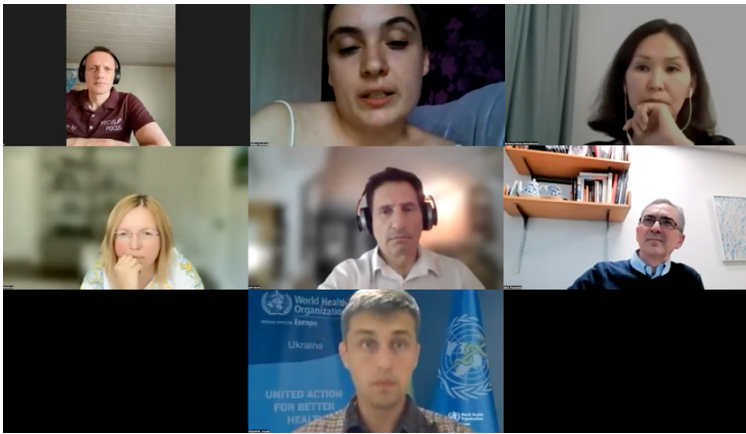
With no end in sight to Russia's war, exhaustion is settling in despite of valiant defiance and determination by Ukrainians. Many endure psychological wounds as the fighting wears on and trauma ensues. Knowing that the cumulative mental toll will only worsen if left unaddressed, a Lviv-based organization of psychotherapists developed a program to expand education and training of Ukrainian practitioners in Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR). An evidence-based psychotherapeutic practice, EMDR is used to treat trauma-related conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). "Within 10 sessions of EMDR [treatment], you can do a lot," says Oksana Nakonechna, President of EMDR Ukraine. "Usually, other methods of psychotherapy [involve] more talking but [when] working with severe trauma, it is not enough to just talk or to interpret... you have to have a good instrument. EMDR is a very good instrument because it refers not only to the psychology of the person but the network in the brain where the trauma [resides]." EMDR applies bilateral stimulation to alleviate distress associated with the traumatic event. Specifically, through effectively accessing and then processing of the traumatic memory, trauma-induced stress is reduced, and adaptive beliefs are strengthened.

Untreated trauma is incredibly damaging to mental health and commonly manifests in difficult, even disturbing, symptoms that cause challenges in patients' daily lives as well as poor or unhealthy coping mechanisms including, potentially, destructive patterns of behavior. As the needs expand, Oksana speaks to the importance of increasing the number of trainings for psychotherapists throughout Ukraine. "Back in 2014, we were volunteers, working by ourselves" Oksana recounts; "Now a lot of different colleagues from other organizations have decided to work less [directly] with patients and spend more time training others. It's very important to have [additional practitioners] trained. There is a lot of suffered people, a lot of injured people and we need good specialists in Ukraine."

In an effort to address the mounting mental health demand for the people of Ukraine, both military and civilian, our consortium, the Heal Ukraine Group (HUG), has supported scholarships to train eight psychotherapists via the EMDR program and curriculum designed by Nakonechna and her colleagues. Following certification, each of these Ukrainian clinicians, in their current working roles, will be in a position to treat actively distressed PTSD patients and help alleviate suffering.

Leading several sessions in Lviv, EMDR Ukraine has trained more than 250 psychotherapists since 2022 both online and in-person. These sessions, which include basic and advanced EMDR trainings, involve several seminars that span across the duration of a year, that last between two to four days and include the development of practical skills through practice sessions. Following completion of training, clinicians can practice EMDR under supervision from a certified EMDR practitioner. Another year and a half is required for certification with a minimum of 20 hours of supervised EMDR work. Two additional group trainings, with a total cohort of 100 participants, are planned for 2024. The training, which costs between 1400 to 1800 dollars, takes roughly two and a half weeks with 8 hour training days for a total of 136 hours. Strengthening the medical interventions of clinicians directly improves health care outcomes for patients, and in turn is an avenue to defend the lives and livelihoods of innocent people caught in the crosshairs of Putin's war.

Dr. Jacqueline Hart, from our HUG team, visited and spoke at First Medical Union of Lviv in April 2023. When rounding with the Psychiatry team there, she understood firsthand why EMDR seems culturally suitable for Ukrainian clinicians and patients alike. Noting that studies of EMDR date only to the late 1980s, Dr. Hart commented that "while EMDR is a relatively young treatment for trauma and not what we might consider the gold-standard in the States, the accessibility and swiftness of this modality in terms of how quickly it can reduce symptoms and improve many lives was evident when talking with both practitioners and patients. There was something alleviating to the clients, in particular, to not get mired in talk therapy and to be offered an approach that felt so tangible."



A recent webinar with the Ukrainian clinical scholars of the Harvard-HUG Medical SAR program and Health Tech Without Borders (HTWB) co-founder, Marianna Petrea-Imenokhoeva, and board member Dr. Jeff Hersch, report on the health care crisis that continues to grow in Ukraine and up-to-date impacts of the war on both civilian life and the country's health care system. Panelists discuss severe unmet needs, opportunities for international collaboration, and ongoing work with NGOs to address these continuing challenges. Please view a recording of the webinar [here](#).

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)**
- **Otoscopes**
- **ECG machines**
- **Rapid Infusers (x2 stationary, x1 for evacuation vehicle) and Disposable kits**

*Please contact us at [info@healukraine.org](mailto:info@healukraine.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/>



Follow us on social media for more updates on our efforts for Ukraine:



Facebook - [@HealUkraineGroup](#)

Twitter - [@HealUkraine](#)

Instagram - [@healukraineorg](#)