

Heal Ukraine Group

May 2023 Newsletter



In Collaboration
with:



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

Following a heavy overnight assault, a medical center in Dnipro is in ruins after a Russian missile hit the complex. The central Ukrainian city was previously considered relatively safe but as the war escalates and Russia continues its flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, more and more civilian sites and medical complexes are targeted and deliberately destroyed. At the most recent assembly of the World Health Organization, as 43 allies joined Ukraine condemning Russia's war and attacks on health care facilities, Russian diplomats accused Ukraine of destroying its own hospitals, in which as of May 24th 2023, 1,256 health facilities have been damaged, 177 reduced to rubble, and 21 percent of all ambulances damaged or destroyed.

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.

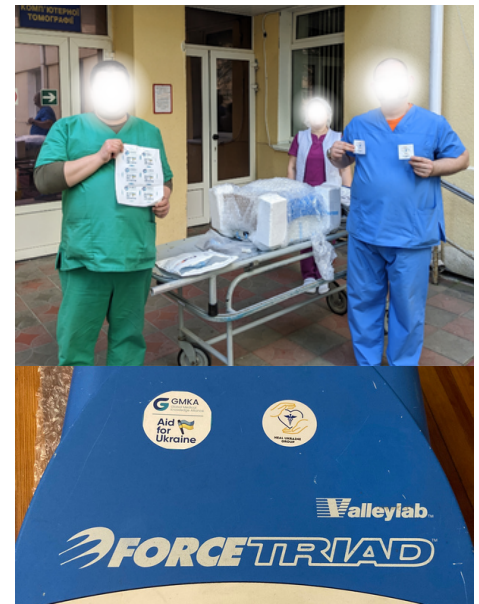
Individual stories highlighting accomplishments of the HUG team may be found below. The faces of Ukrainian patients and healthcare workers are blurred to protect their identities at this time of war.



Delivery of Supplies to the Front Lines

Since the beginning of this month, over 140 Russian missiles and drones have rained on Ukraine. As a consequence of these continued onslaught of attacks, civilian physical and mental health is at risk. Health care facilities require support in the delivery of essential medical supplies to provide necessary medical care and services desperately needed during this time of war.

The tactical medicine supplies delivered to Ukraine last month are being assembled into first aid kits by volunteers of UA First Aid to soon be in the hands of soldiers on the front line, where primary intervention saves lives. These first aid kits are used to stop heavy bleeding, and for stabilizing injured soldiers for transport to nearby medical clinics. In addition, a ForceTriad electrosurgical unit is at a frontline hospital, supporting a team of surgeons who requested the device to optimize surgical procedure conditions. The device can help control bleeding and allow for improved tissue cutting and coagulation.



Expanding Support for Children with Autism

Over the past decade, Ukraine has made tremendous progress in improving resources and services for children with autism, and since 2014, new policies implemented across the country have encouraged advocacy, inclusion, and education of children of the neurodivergent community. Though, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, autism-related services were completely halted leaving millions without essential health care services in this critical period of wartime. Now, dealing with trauma, PTSD, heightened anxiety, and depression, children with autism lack proper support systems to guide them through this very sudden and drastic shift into the unfamiliar and unknown. Here at HUG, we have teamed with partner NGO Autism Unity to address these unmet needs and support Ukrainian clinicians, specialists, and autism support centers who are tirelessly working to provide families with autism online consultations, webinars, telehealth services, and courses for their children to best be able to cope with the war and live successfully and comfortably. Two centers that recently received laptops shared their gratitude: "Your generosity allows us to continue our mission in helping children grow and reach their potential. Once again we would like to express our sincere thanks on behalf of everyone we serve and our entire team".

This initiative has supported the delivery of 111 laptops, including 54 donated from Analog Devices Inc, that support families and specialists to facilitate the development of necessary life skills for children with autism in Ukraine.



Takeaways From Lviv: Creating Solutions in Real Time

Dr. Jacki Hart, physician and behavioral health specialist, Director of the Bassuk Center on Homeless and Vulnerable Children and Youth, and co-founder of HUG, attended and spoke at the International Rehabilitation Forum in Lviv on April 12th as invited by Unbroken.

Below she reflects on her experience and takeaways from her time in Lviv.

Traveling to in Lviv during the early part of April was profoundly meaningful. The fierce will and determination of the Ukrainian people I've met is admirable and inspiring – contagious, really. What many have accomplished during these unfathomable 15 months, applying sheer grit and ingenuity mixed with a unique blend of authenticity, candor, fortitude, and humility is astounding. There is no time and no need for pomp or circumstance; no space for arrogance or egotism.

My journey to Lviv was by invitation to participate in a conference on physical and psychological trauma sponsored by Unbroken of First Medical Union Hospital. I felt honored and humbled to be there. During my opening lecture, focused on adopting a systems-based perspective to adapt Trauma Informed Care (TIC) organizationally, culturally, and intergenerationally, I mentioned that I was there to bear witness, both personally and professionally. The learning, discovering, and sharing are bidirectional. Firsthand exposure (albeit brief) promised to influence how we can strengthen our Harvard, Boston-based clinical support through educational initiatives. The value that we aim to achieve centers not only on the acute crisis at hand but also on a longer-range vision and plan to help improve healthcare delivery and medical systems. Being there fortified this objective and generated ideas for particular directions to pursue, including building capacity around child psychiatry and psychology, an area of training that is lacking in Ukraine and a project that we are now engaged in developing. Being in Lviv carried an odd façade of safety; the city is intact, stores are open, banks are functioning, and people are basically out and about, at least until curfew. There is a disquieting consciousness about the unrelenting destruction on the other side of the country, especially with many internally displaced persons (IDPs) relocated to Lviv, the Western most city just one hour from the Polish border. There is also tireless awareness that the sirens can sound at any moment, signaling the need to rush to a bomb shelter; to avoid being caught off guard, I slept in sweats rather than pajamas and took five-minute showers. Yet, I only had to endure that shadow of anxiety and uncertainty for a few days – I didn't have to experience the constant gnawing of being on edge that Ukrainians are living with Every. Single. Day.

The contrast was most apparent when I spent two days in Krakow before returning to Boston. The ease of a free city was demonstrable in comparison. Polish people were running, biking, and simply existing without the relentless tension and apprehension that has become customary for those living in Lviv and throughout Ukraine.

In addition to lecturing, participating in panels, meeting many members from the President's Ministry, including the Ministers of Health, Veterans Affairs, and Mental Health as well as other governmental dignitaries, such as the Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovyi (who met privately with our small, visiting delegation and also hosted a reception), I rounded at the hospital with the psychiatry team. Since the Big War broke out, psychiatrists at First Medical Union, led by Dr. Oleh Berezyuk, see every trauma victim, military and civilian, upon admission to the hospital. Ukraine has a devastating history of psychological misappropriation and abuse from the former Soviet Union and current-day Russia that apply made-up psychological diagnoses for mere political dissent.

Therefore, integration of psychiatric care into general medical and surgical treatment, though imminently necessary and worthy, is not only a novel concept, but also one that is met with justifiable resistance by Ukrainian clinicians and citizens. Psychiatric and trauma-informed care serve as excellent examples of how our HUG-Harvard SAR team can help balance between short- and long-term goals – how we can fuse the current and future, compounding demands with step-by-step shifting of the cultural beliefs and customs. My visit codified the value, for example, of our instinct to prioritize sponsoring a Ukrainian clinician to study Consult Liaison (CL) Psychiatry at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH).

Over the course of my time at the Lviv hospital and conference, I met a POW (prisoner of war) who had been held captive by the Russians for eight months. He and his wife have started an NGO (non-governmental organization) to help spouses of prisoners detained and tortured; I also met trauma victims who suffered burns and amputations – both military and civilians –transferred to the relatively-safe Lviv from all parts of the country including Bakhmut and Kherson.



Pictured from left to right: Dr. Oleh Samchuk, General Director of First Lviv Medical Union; Dr. Jacki Hart; Maxim Dotsenko, General Director of the National Committee of the Society of the Red Cross of Ukraine; and the Minister of Mental Health. Dr. Jacki Hart introduces herself, HUG, and the importance of not only addressing acute needs but of building capacity for the country and its healthcare system through international collaboration. The headphones are for real-time translation.

Whether a “good” idea or not (which isn’t relevant), I ended my time in Eastern Europe touring Auschwitz with my dear friend and now colleague, Sofiya Hrechuk, the psychiatrist who spent three months studying CL Psychiatry with HUG team member and mentor Dr. Polina Teslyer. Our guide at the former concentration camp described the “unimaginable” torture, showing us sickening evidence of real hair and ashes; my thoughts of the POW I met in Lviv and his description of “losing half of himself – both in weight and in identity” remained poignant.

Dr. Berezyuk, mentioned above, who is spearheading the mental health initiatives throughout the hospital including integrated, multidisciplinary inpatient care and outpatient continuum of care, serves on our HUG-Harvard Scientific Advisory Board (SAB). Sofiya Hrechuk was hand-selected by Dr. Berezyuk; his recommendation could not have been more suitable. Drs. Berezyuk and Hrechuk are charged, together with their growing and robust team of psychiatrists, psychologists, and other mental health providers, to further institute their vision. Oleh describes Sofiya, since her return from her time at Harvard, as a “changed person.” Her newly found perspective and confidence reinforce their mutual, as well as our collective, commitment.

I left Lviv with many key takeaways, life lessons, and a deepened resolve to help cultivate and nurture change for short- and long-term benefit in Ukraine. Despite lack of control regarding outcomes, I have felt, since my return, like I carry a bit of the unique Ukrainian conviction that I can, to the best of my ability, not only cope with problems and challenges but also create solutions in real time. I was thinking about this one early morning as I drove to a work site where I would be talking with moms from Guatemala and El Salvador who have endured an unbearable amount to get to the States, and since they’ve been in the U.S. I work with these women regularly; upon my return from Lviv, I’ve noticed a somewhat subtle shift. That day, for example, driving to the Center, I felt a deepened sense of calm that the women can overcome the (equally unimaginable) trauma they’ve experienced. That moment of realization was a direct reflection that the lessons between us – American and Ukrainian clinicians – is bidirectional. My time working with Ukrainians, both here and in Lviv, is improving my other daily roles and responsibilities.

Personally and professionally, there is an odd comfort in that balance, which is decidedly active -- NOT passive. It’s not “acceptance,” it is perseverance. HUG’s continued work and partnerships – both established as well as newly forging – continue to maintain our overarching objective to enhance processes and build capacity, within the context of cultural appropriateness, while simultaneously working collaboratively toward advancing societal and medical competency. In addition to childhood trauma mentioned above, areas where we are currently applying these principles by developing trainings and shaping partnerships across the Atlantic involve treatment of traumatic brain injury, maternal-fetal medicine, and reconstructive surgery.

Please see recent coverage on the Harvard SAR program from NPR's [The World](#).

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@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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