

A Plan to Improve Pediatric Burn Care in Ukraine

To the Editor:

Ukraine has a great foundation for burn care with many educated and dedicated physicians, nurses, and other medical practitioners. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the resources for maintaining and updating facilities, education, and training have suffered. Children in Ukraine with severe and debilitating burn injuries often do not receive necessary medical treatment because of limited resources in Ukrainian hospitals and the cost of treatment. These children, generally, do not have the opportunity to go abroad for treatment because of limited family resources.¹

In March 2005, a young girl came to Shriners Hospital from Ukraine for treatment for injuries she sustained in a fire while she was saving her younger sister. A physician who accompanied the girl to Shriners from Ukraine asked for assistance in bringing another patient from Ukraine to Shriners for treatment.

In arranging for the treatment of this second child, two requirements became apparent: 1) completing the Shriners application process, and 2) obtaining funds for the child and his guardian's transportation, housing, and food. To obtain money for these needs as well as to organize volunteers to help the patient and his guardian, an anesthesiologist at Shriners contacted several charitable organizations and influential people who became involved and contributed.

In the next 5 years, 14 other children from different parts of Ukraine were brought to the Shriners Hospital in Boston for treatment. Generally, these children receive acute treatment in Ukraine and come to Boston for rehabilitative treatment and reconstructive surgery.

Based on the volume of pediatric cases from Ukraine and the high cost of transporting and housing patients in Boston, combined with a reasonably high standard of care in Ukraine, Boston and Ukrainian physicians launched an initiative to improve pediatric burn care in Ukraine. This program included a number of steps:

- (1) Boston and Ukrainian physicians collaborated on the care of Ukrainian burn injured children via telephone and teleconference.
- (2) Boston physicians initiated a program to train doctors and nurses for perioperative burn care and obtained funding to establish a learning center.
- (3) Hospital conditions were improved by obtaining funding and grants for necessary equipment. Patient facilities at the Lviv Burn Center were provided with necessary medical equipment and patient care supplies.
- (4) Physicians developed a local Ukrainian network of hospitals to collaborate in western Ukraine for improving burn care and consulting on patient care.
- (5) Boston physicians traveled to Ukraine to examine patients with their counterparts and to train local providers.
- (6) An exchange program to bring Ukrainian physicians to the Shriners hospital to observe care was developed. As part of this program, a skilled Ukrainian surgeon came to Boston for a 2-week observership in 2011. It is anticipated that additional Ukrainian physicians will follow on an annual basis.
- (7) Physicians started a burn prevention campaign. As funding is obtained, the goal is to increase awareness and decrease the high rate of preventable burn injuries in Ukraine.
- (8) Boston physicians established a nonprofit corporation (Doctors Collaborating to Help Children) to obtain funding to improve pediatric burn care in Ukraine.

Subsequently, based on the volume of cases in Ukraine, Boston physicians launched the first Shriners Outreach Clinic in Eastern Europe, in Ukraine,

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whereby Boston physicians travel to Ukraine annually and treat patients in collaboration with local physicians. As a result of this, more patients are able to get the care that they need locally, local physicians have the experience of working with the Boston physicians and learn in the process, and the most severe cases are identified for transport to Boston for care. As part of the clinic and the ongoing collaboration and training, a pediatric anesthesiologist and reconstructive surgeon from Boston are making a commitment to travel to Ukraine on an annual basis. They are enlisting the help of residents and nurses who will travel with them and provide care to patients.

The goal of the project has been and remains to teach local physicians to treat patients while still bringing the most severe patients to Boston for highly specialized care. Through the steps and efforts outlined above, a system has evolved that will lead to sustainable improvement in the care of burn victims in Ukraine.

REFERENCE

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