

RUTH D. WILLIAMS, MD

## Reaching Out to Ukraine

The Ukrainian Village on the near West Side of Chicago is a lively neighborhood featuring chic shops, the Ukrainian National Museum, the Ukrainian Museum of Modern Art, the Ukrainian Cultural Center, and three churches, including two with distinctive domes. There are more than 1 million Ukrainian Americans, and to the north, Canada has even more citizens of Ukrainian descent (1.4 million)—in fact, Canada has the third largest Ukrainian population in the world, behind only Ukraine and Russia. As North American ophthalmologists watch the war in Ukraine from afar, many of us are asking our colleagues of Ukrainian descent, “What can I do to help my ophthalmology colleagues in Ukraine?”

I asked this question of Andrew Iwach, a glaucoma specialist in San Francisco. His answer: “There’s no central agency or organization in Ukraine to accept donations and distribute supplies. Several individuals and groups are developing the infrastructure to accept monetary donations and medical supplies and are working on delivering what’s needed to the right people. But it takes time, the situation is quite fluid, and we’re working amid a war.”

Several organizations have shifted their mission to help. For instance, the Ukrainian Medical Association of North America (UMANA) is a professional organization that was founded in 1950 to assist immigrant physicians. Pediatrician Maria Hrycelak, president of UMANA’s foundation, explains that they have quickly adapted to respond to the outpouring of interest in helping and reports that “the generosity of physicians is overwhelming.” The Illinois chapter delivered 50 tons of medicine and supplies to Ukrainian physicians in early March and another 50 tons a few weeks later. Assisted by the Consulate General of Ukraine in Chicago and a private donor who sponsored the plane, the group initially focused on supplying anesthetics, antibiotics, sutures, and wound vacs to ophthalmologists and other surgeons treating trauma victims. However, because shipping is expensive, Maria suggests it’s more efficient to purchase medical supplies in Europe and is recommending monetary donations to their foundation instead of donations of supplies.

In Canada, about a dozen ophthalmologists of Ukrainian ancestry organized a work group called Eyes on Ukraine. Mi-

chael Kryshtalskyj, Larissa Derzko-Dzulynsky, and Stephen Kosar are participating in this group, with three goals: 1) to procure and distribute ophthalmic medications and equipment to Ukrainian ophthalmologists, 2) to establish a telemedicine program to provide support for complex trauma cases, and 3) to accept monetary donations through an existing foundation. Steve says, “Our members have contacts with ophthalmologists in Ukraine and Eastern Europe who are communicating their specific needs and assisting with [delivery] logistics.” Eyes on Ukraine is collaborating with industry to donate or provide at-cost medications, supplies, and equipment.

In Europe, the European Society of Cataract & Refractive Surgeons (ESCRS) has worked to procure and distribute supplies and has identified two storage sites in Krakow. In Olsztyn, Poland, Andrzej Grzybowski accepted supplies at his surgery center and facilitated their distribution into Ukraine. Ophthalmologists in Lviv, Dimetro Goriachev and Ihor Novytsky, along with Ukrainian-German retina specialist Lyubomyr Lytyvnchuk, are helping with distribution and with identifying the changing needs of Ukrainian ophthalmologists. ESCRS is committing resources to purchase equipment and medications.

Needs and priorities will continue to shift as the war unfolds. For example, both UMANA and Eyes on Ukraine are considering programs to assist the more than 4 million refugees in Poland and other European countries who need routine medicines and health care.

Ophthalmologists are eager to help their colleagues in Ukraine. However, it is difficult to get medical supplies into a conflict zone—and even then, there are challenges to deploying supplies to the most critical areas as the conflict evolves. As Andrew points out, the best way to help is to support a reputable organization that has the infrastructure and expertise to deliver. In addition to the programs being developed by ophthalmologists, the Academy has identified several organizations with established programs in the region: Heart to Heart International, Americares, and Direct Relief.

We really are a global community, and we share the commitment to treating eye disease and eye trauma in peace and in war.