

The "Recovery" Rehabilitation Center



I work at three different Rehabilitation Centers. This one is called "Recovery", also known locally as the "Chernobyl Hospital" because many radiation victims from the nuclear power plant disaster in 1986 came here for treatment. At Recovery, I work in the large room seen here with 6 or 8 other therapists. I enjoy working in a large setting because I learn by watching others, I like seeing patients' progress, and I like the camaraderie. It is wonderful to be part of a team and work together.



This center was funded and developed by Olena and Victor Pinchuk. Hats off and a deep bow to Olena Pinchuk who started the phenomenal work against HIV/AIDS in 2003. Clearly an overwhelming challenge that was wrestled under control by attracting support from the US during the Clinton administration and support from world famous artists and musicians (like Elton John at Maidan!) - all in support of HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention! All along the way, Olena kept a keen focus on the importance of mental health and incorporated these needs at the forefront while implementing all of the foundation's projects.

When Russia first started occupying Eastern Ukraine in 2014, and the country was finding itself woefully unprepared to resist this assault, the Olena and Victor Pinchuk Foundation pivoted to training military medics and teaching civilians 'rules of conduct' when encountering Russian aggression. While military medical backpacks were

supplied and trainings continued, the work against HIV/AIDS did not stop. Inspirational cultural awareness projects were developed along side efforts for the distribution of anti-retroviral therapies in the occupied areas of Ukraine.

The Foundation was continuing its work on all these fronts, including the development of education and infrastructure support for women entrepreneurs... when the full-scale invasion happened in 2022. Russian tanks filled the streets of Kyiv, and numerous cities in the East and the South sustained indiscriminate shootings and killings of civilians on the streets. Olena Pinchuk quickly pivoted to provide emergency humanitarian aid.

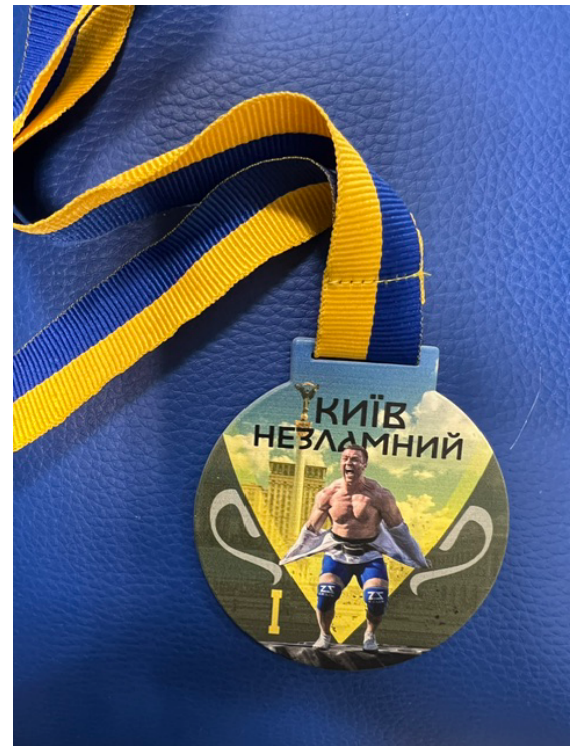
Since then, a national network of rehabilitation centers has been created - more than 10 so far. These are large facilities. My hospital is a complex of several multistory buildings. The rehabilitation wing has all the current state-of-the-art equipment and highly skilled providers.

I have a special niche here because I work with "touch". All rehabilitation therapists routinely touch patients all the time: moving them in and out of wheelchairs or adjusting their prosthesis or putting them in slings on ceiling tracts to teach them to walk. But they are not using touch itself as a form of therapy. There is some focus at this clinic using the "Mulligan Concept" in manual therapy, which I use as well for my treatment options (it is a bodywork method of 'pinning' a muscle or fascia and having the patient actively move the joint effectively lengthening tissue and dissolving fiber). My specific contribution is that I get to use touch to connect with the trauma holding patterns of the body and work with patients' readiness and ability to negotiate this pattern as they choose to or need to. Touch also offers a sensory integration process that can be very helpful for managing pain syndromes. And of course, I do also use touch in the treatment of orthopedic injuries, but the methods are still fundamentally based on touching in a way that effectively moves tissue into positions of more optimal function.

I couldn't be more honored, and humbled, to be welcomed to touch these patients - these beautiful Ukrainian people. At this hospital, the level of severity of injury is high. And because of that - my work becomes more effective. When pain is high, and the mental stressors from trauma are acute, my interventions are immediately more welcomed and openly received.

I do have to rely on my hands, and the language barrier accentuates that. It is a limitation that I am not able to verbally interact with them about their body experience. My patient history is limited, my physical assessments are limited, and my follow up eval is limited. I watch keenly for body language, and I lean into the experience - between me and them... and I let it be what is.

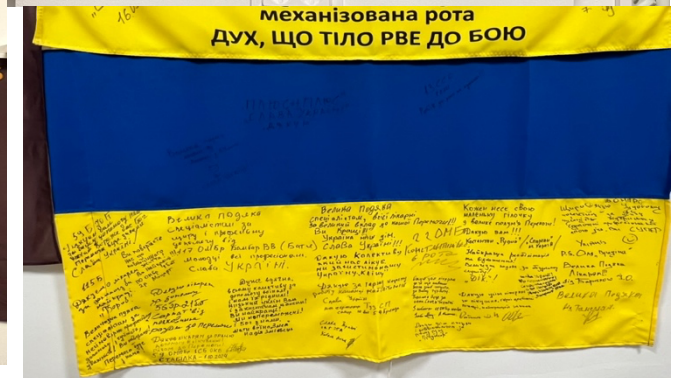
And truly, I feel deeply appreciated. I am gifted smiles, and handshakes, and selfies, and honey (6 jars so far!), and today I even got a medal! - a gift from one of my women Defenders - a medal that she won at a power lifting competition, and gave to me. Her call sign is "Fox" - so I have now learned how to say "fox" in Ukrainian. She brings her trainer for me to work on too.

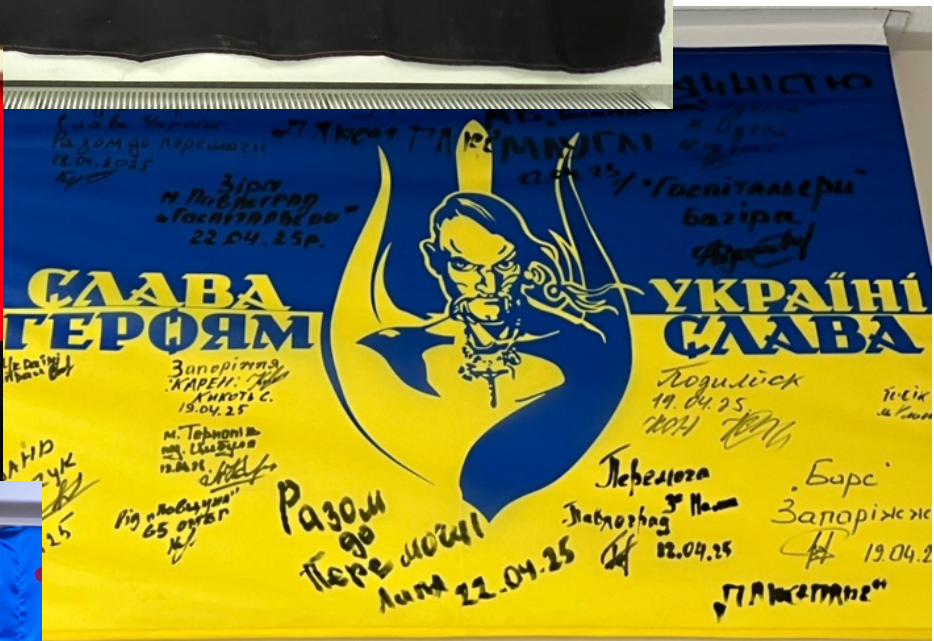


These missile casings hang out in the corner, they do hold PT supplies, but mostly they are deco.



These flags hang on the wall. They are donated by Defenders that have received care here.







The slogans on the flags mostly have motivational anthems (Courage and Strength, To Victory, Unbreakable, For the Sake of Every Life, One Native Land, e.g.), as well as the names of their brigades (Field Medicine Hospital Workers, Transcarpathian Brigade, Coast Guard Brigade, etc.), and nicknames of their brigades (Da Vinci's Wolves, Walnuts, Robots...)

At the Recovery Hospital, in my room, none of my colleagues speak English well enough for a conversation. They all speak some because they have studied it some in school, tho now it's long forgotten. But between their English, and my basic Ukrainian, we seem to get by fine. And if absolutely needed we can pull out Google Translate. Same with the Defenders. I have yet to meet one on this trip that I can have a conversation with. Last year in Kyiv, it was kind of the same - but I did have a "coordinator" that I saw occasionally that spoke English, and out of 140+ Defenders I worked with - 5 spoke English and we could have a conversation. Touch must mean something... almost none of this experience would have happened without it.