

Rehabilitation Hospitals

Yuliia Kashpruk, from the Vinnytsia City Council, has arranged for myself and Natalia Rozhok, the City's Deputy Head of the Department of Healthcare, to visit several Rehabilitation Centers - a city renowned for its expertise.

In the parking lot waiting for our hosts, I was happy to find this message on the ambulance



One day maybe we'd have something like this from Boulder! "From Boulder, with Love - to Vinnytsia", or Longmont, (after all, I live in Longmont) - still Boulder County. Maybe we could make a Sister State with Vinnytsia Oblast and Colorado State - then it could be from all of us! It's kind of cool though to think of our town's name on an ambulance in Ukraine!! These are the things that are possible here.



On our tour, we first meet Nikita Haidukov, Нікіта Валерійович Гайдуков, who I will get to meet again next week as he invited me to work with his patients. He works at the Vinnytsia City Clinical Hospital also known as the "Mother and Child Center". Nikita is a specialist in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and also a Physical Therapist. He has been at the forefront of new technologies developed by Ukraine, in Vinnytsia. One of which is a system called TouchVision - a rehabilitation platform using a touch screen for patients. The system tracks various metrics of patients' abilities to react to LED stimuli on the screen. That is, if you are a patient with a history of stroke, or brain injury, or Parkinsons, for example - touch the screen as prompted with speed and precision and regain cognitive concentration, restore hand-eye coordination, and sharpen your reaction times. This system is at the cutting edge of visual-motor training and is integrated into his clinic.



The clinic also uses Neurac/Redcord therapy systems (developed in Norway in the early 1990's). It is basically a system for suspending patients with harnesses, slings and pulleys, allowing them to move with assistance creating a pain-free experience for exercise. You can see the red cords in this set-up for pediatric patients.



This is Nikita - nice guy huh!

Nikita is trained in many modalities, including Ergon Technique (using rounded metal "blades" to work with soft tissue), and numerous forms of physiotherapy - basically his clinic is leading the technologies in rehabilitation therapy in the world. And he is expanding resources into other hospitals... some of which we will be visiting soon.

He asks me about my work, and I explain that I don't have any machines that I work with. That my interest is with touch,

and the changes within a person when they feel that their pain, or their life experience, is "touched" - that is, that I have reached something with that connection that they have not experienced before... That somebody is connected with them and with their pain... and how this can be used for treatment of PTSD. That I can work with the body that is holding this trauma, and that patients can have a relationship with themselves and their trauma, and through touch - not have to feel so alone. They get to hold and release as they feel comfortable to do so. That the body has permission to not hold these experiences so rigidly. Then they can be more comfortable within themselves.

He seems very interested in this. And I would think so, because here as well as in the US, mostly people use all kinds of tools, or needles, or rolling balls, or thumpers, or almost anything but touch. So, the oldest of all healing techniques is now something new.

So, then on with our tour: First we go to Vinnytsia Rehabilitation Hospital #1 and visit a newly renovated wing - specifically for rehabilitation, and with a strong focus on mental health therapies. The wing is renovated from the philanthropic work of Victor and Olena Pinchuk. They are responsible for the building of countless Rehabilitation Centers - including the one I volunteer at now! They have made a special focus for mental health rehabilitation, and they have not turned a blind eye to HIV/AIDS resources either.

The need for Rehabilitation Centers has exploded - with the war. So many medical resources are now devoted to this branch of health care.

This newly renovated rehabilitation wing is called: Повернення, вдячні нашим героям і героїням - which google translates to something like "Return, grateful to our heroes and heroines". I imagine anyone arriving here is grateful to be returning too - after they most likely have grazed death.



We meet Inga, Ihra (though sadly I have missed her last name) - she is one of the therapists here.

The place is somehow profoundly calm. I don't know what it is, but something is at work here. I wonder if it may be from Saint Panteleimon, hanging out on the wall - a 4th century patron saint of healers and the sick, ... watching over... His name means "all compassionate". As he hangs on the wall Yuliia tells me that he is important. I believe it. But the calm is also coming from the people that work here - they are the ones that hang in the rooms with all the patients.

There are 1-1 psychotherapy rooms, and group therapy rooms, short term in-patient rooms, and even a ceramics studio. I got excited for a minute to see a massage table in one of the rooms - but I was told it was for emergency injections.





We then go to an adjacent part of the building to visit the hospital itself which functions as a 24/7 general and emergency hospital. They are also expanding care options to include more rehabilitation services.



The pictures are sparse as I am protecting patient privacy. And I don't have any pictures of our next hospital: The Second Vinnytsia Territorial Medical Association where we meet Serhii Korolenko. He is also expanding the rehabilitation services at his hospital and working in collaboration with Mehad, a French NGO for humanitarian aid that expanded services from Syria, then to Ukraine in 2022. He is eager to continue to develop resources and proudly guides us through his hospital. It is a busy place, and he explains this is the main Emergency Department for the city and received the majority of patients from the large bombings of July 14, 2022.

I asked our hosts today about their needs. And what they all answered was about the development of facilities. I came to understand that before the full-scale invasion their healthcare needs were similar to the needs of any civilian population elsewhere in the world. But because of the war and the millions of people now with war injuries rehabilitation services have needed to be extensively expanded. (? -is it up to millions? - well, - it depends on how it is counted. There are almost 1 million Ukrainians currently serving in active duty. And if you factor in mental health rehabilitation, with now more than 5 years of full-scale war... well yes - millions of people are needing rehabilitation.)

Thus, Ukraine is trying to handle this need. New facilities are being built, and existing facilities are expanding to provide services. This comes at great cost to an already

strained health care system. The challenges are greater than can be imagined when we factor in that Russian aggression has aimed at bombing health care facilities, and that healthcare personnel have been mobilized to the front leaving behind fragmented infrastructures.

Rehabilitation is a complex field of medicine because life changing injuries usually require ongoing or follow up care, and delayed care can further complicate recovery. Managing disabilities not only requires adaptive equipment and prostheses for example, but also home renovations. Many veterans will require ongoing assistance in their daily lives, for the rest of their lives. Also, even if the war ends today, - new injuries related to explosive mines can be expected for decades to come.

Mental health recovery is needed for everybody. Nobody has escaped the effects of this war. Exemptions excluded, all men ages 25-60 are currently "mobilized" and are serving in some capacity. All families, with few exceptions, have someone that has died, or is at the front. Children are growing up in occupied territories. Women are enduring severe cruelty from war related sexual violence as Russians seize villages, farms, homes... It is not my intention to be overwhelming, but the repercussions are un-imaginable and will continue to reverberate.

In touring these facilities, it shouldn't surprise me that the Ukrainian courage and determination extends here as well. Providers have their own forms of PTSD, yet they continue working expanding their capacities. I don't know how they do it... transforming so much suffering into compassion.

Every system has a breaking point, and I can't, and won't let myself think of what that would be for Ukraine. They have already given so much.