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Letter from Kyiv

Over ten months have passed since the Russian military attacked Ukraine and started the largest war in Europe since 1945. Since then, many cities and villages have been destroyed in the north, east and south regions of Ukraine. Thousands of humans have been killed and over seven million refugees had to flee the country, with

every effort being made to save the lives of women and children. Approximately, one-quarter of the country's total population had left their homes by the end of March 2022.

Before the war, healthcare in general, and neurosurgery in particular had been constantly improving, despite financial challenges. At that time limited numbers of neurosurgical centres routinely used modern neurosurgical equipment and instruments for highly qualified neurosurgical care. A full range of functional neurosurgical procedures for patients with epilepsy, movement disorders, and chronic pain were available only at the Romodanov neurosurgery institute.

During the months of war, the Russian military either completely or partially destroyed civilian hospitals in the north and east regions of Ukraine. Other hospitals

continue to work under bombing, shelling and missile attacks (Kharkiv, Zaporozhye, Mykolaiv...etc.). Many patients had to stay in hospitals because their dwelling places were occupied or destroyed. The healthcare system suffered significantly from the damage and destruction of hospital facilities, the medical supply system and other logistics. For the first

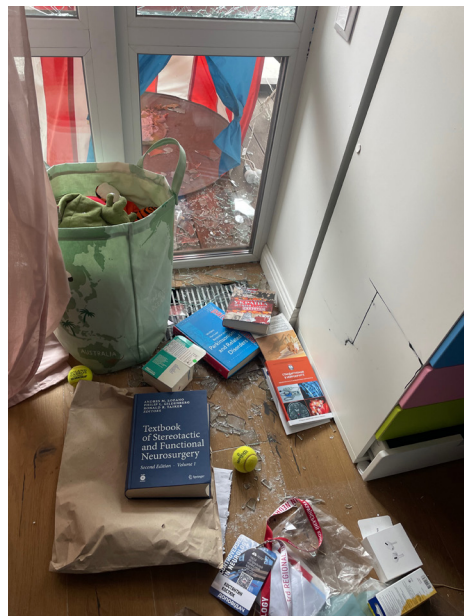
few months, most neurosurgical units admitted wounded military and civilians, and only a few departments in the west part of Ukraine provided elective neurosurgical operations, serving the 8 million people who had been internally displaced, seeking safety in the west of the country.

Because of the uncertain and dangerous situation in Kyiv, all functional neurosurgical operations were put on hold as all efforts focused on providing supply of medication for patients, many of whom needed regular use of specific medications (e.g., antiepileptic drugs and Parkinson's medications). Intensive support from international humanitarian and professional medical organisations provided much needed (partial) relief. For example, the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE) and the International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE) formed an Emergency Response (Ukraine) Task Force, headed by the President of the ILAE, Professor J. Helen Cross, providing a fast reaction to war related challenges.

Since the middle of April, the Romodanov Neurosurgery Institute restored all forms of neurosurgical care. During the war, many DBS patients had to leave charging systems at home during emergency evacuation and could only retrieve them after the Russian occupants had left. For these periods, some of our patients were sharing charging system with each other. This experience demonstrated a new benefit of lesioning operations in functional neurosurgery, as patients are not dependent on additional devices and regular hospital visits. Currently, when I discuss the surgical options with patients who are good candidate for DBS treatment, I point out the advantages and disadvantages of rechargeable systems in comparison with primary cell IPGs and lesioning operations.

Functional neurosurgery is a highly technical field of neurosurgery, which requires significant financial support. In the foreseeable future, we do not expect sufficient support from the government, as most of the Ukrainian budget is likely to go towards rebuilding civilian infrastructure. Supporting emergency medical care and rehabilitation will have to take priority in the near future. Support from international funds, professional societies and global medical device companies will be needed to maintain the development of functional neurosurgery in Ukraine. I propose to open a discussion regarding the creation a special support program for functional neurosurgery in Ukraine, headed by the WSSFN to provide financial and

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Ukraine Healthcare in Kyiv (CONT.)

technical help in order to keep functional neurosurgery going.

Lastly, I would like to express my great appreciation to colleagues and friends I met at the 19th Biennial Meeting of the WSSFN in Incheon, Korea for expressing their endless support for Ukraine. This support makes me confident in the ability to maintain and drive further advances in functional neurosurgery during these difficult times that I and my fellow citizens are going through.



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