Helping hands: Mexican doctors treat Ukrainian refugees

The Mexican specialists helped by treating minor injuries in women and children to providing psychological care to patients.

28/06/2022

TecSalud

Hadassah Internacional

Four doctors from **TecSalud**, **Tec de Monterrey's** health system, joined an **international humanitarian aid** team in Poland to **provide medical care** to **Ukrainian refugees** displaced by the **war with Russia.**

Hadassah International, an association that aims to save lives and care for patients in adverse situations, opened a care center in the city of **Przemyśl** in southeastern Poland, where the **Mexican specialists** helped out.

For eight days, pediatric emergency physician **Rommy Pineda**, **pediatrician Diego de Gamboa**, and emergency physicians **Angeles Hernandez** and **Emmanuel Ortiz**, worked twelve-hour shifts or were on stand-by, attending up to

100 patients in one day.

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(From left to right) Olga Davidson, Emmanuel Ortiz, Diego de Gamboa, Ángeles Hernández, Rommy Pineda, and Aviv Muallem.

Mexicans caring for war refugees

During their time in Poland, the four Mexican specialists treated children and adults with **illnesses** related to **overcrowding** or **confinement**.

“We treated patients in the morning, then in the afternoon we traveled to the ***Ukrainian Consulate*** *that was about 10 minutes away, and* ***we spent an hour treating*** *the people who were staying at the shelter there,”* said Dr. Ortiz

The Mexican doctors said they mainly treated **infected wounds,** and **chronic diseases that had been neglected** due to lack of access to treatment or medication.

However, **they did not treat anyone with gunshot wounds**, and if more serious cases arrived, they were taken directly to a hospital.

The doctors also treated patients who simply wanted to **let off steam**, who just needed to be listened to or **hugged** to feel better.

They mentioned that the people from the center were transferred to the country that granted them refuge, where they will have the opportunity to **start over.**

TecSalud doctors during their activities at the Humanitarian Aid Center.

Seeing the consequences of war

All of them faced **difficult moments**, which they admitted **not being prepared for.**

They remembered a **boy** who didn’t want to leave his **teddy bear** alone. He would even leave it with the others while he went to the bathroom. There was also **a girl who was so scared** that she didn’t want to talk to anyone.

They witnessed a man having an **anxiety attack** because he lost his passport, and they heard the story of a man who was **hidden in a basement for 60 days.**

On February 24, **Russia militarily invaded Ukraine,** forcing around **five million Ukrainians**, mainly women and children, to leave their country, according to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The **UNHCR** estimates that **1.18 million Ukrainians** are in Poland as **refugees.**

Witnessing people’s solidarity

The TecSalud doctors also shared the **positives:** how the children adapted, enjoying their routine of activities on a daily basis; the boy who had lost a leg but who enjoyed playing the piano; and the drawings that covered the walls were some of the things they mentioned.

These specialists agreed that the **solidarity of the people** was the best thing they witnessed.

The TecSalud doctors worked in **teams of three or four people**, forming a **medical team alongside nurses and translators**, who were just a small part of a large group of volunteers that ran this shelter.

*“Everyone **in the center was a volunteer**, from the medics to the people who prepared the food, as well as the people who cleaned the bathrooms,”* Gamboa said.

***“No one was getting paid** to be there and there were people from all over the world. **We had the opportunity to meet some incredible people,**”* he said.

*“The **translators were key**; I had the opportunity to meet a girl from the United States, she and her husband had quit their jobs to go help because she **spoke Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, and English.** She asked herself when else in her life these four languages would be so useful.”*

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Grateful for the opportunity to help

Dr. Hernández says that although the reality in the shelter is harsh because of the difficult situations, she appreciated the opportunity to **help them feel better or take away the pain.**

"It's really gratifying. *I loved the experience, I've no words to describe it.*

"Although we had to attend to 80 patients in 12 hours, without being able to sit down, without eating, ***being able to help so many people who are in misfortune is very gratifying****,"* said the emergency doctor.

They left on June 13 and returned to Monterrey in the early hours of June 21. They agree that **they are not and will not be the same people** that left Mexico.

"You can't be blind to the problems that are happening on the other side of the world, you can't be blind to the problems that are happening in your country," said Dr. Gamboa.

"There are many ways to help, but ***the most important is to promote the desire to help*** *and it's something that stayed with me after the experience."*

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TecSalud colaboration with Hadassah International

Guillermo Torre, Rector of TecSalud, said that the collaboration with Hadassah International to provide **humanitarian aid** is a very important experience that opens a new perspective for the institution's doctors.

"As doctors, our priority is always people's health. Today, we are facing a global crisis that can't be ignored, ***and we've decided to support this important humanitarian aid by joining it****,"* said Torre.

Rafael Zaga, president of Hadassah Mexico, **thanked TecSalud for joining this mission** and recognized the enthusiasm and willingness of the doctors who helped on behalf of the institution.

Jorge Diener, executive director of **Hadassah International**, said that just over 30,000 people have been treated to date.

“Under the current circumstances and context, there is no time to plan or implement procedures. The needs are immediate because as time passes, ***the circumstances change.*** *All of this changes you and gives you a goal to focus on,* ***to help others****,”* Diener said.

Founded in 1983, Hadassah International includes a network of volunteers of all denominations and nationalities. It focuses on the **advancement and cooperation of medicine and science** beyond politics, religion, and borders.

This NGO **received a nomination** from the Hadassah Medical Center for the **Nobel Peace Prize** in recognition of the role it plays in the **pursuit of world health and peace.**

“As ***representatives of Mexico and TecSalud,*** *we’re proud to be part of this brigade,* ***which I’m sure will go down in history,”*** said Dr. Pineda.

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