Letter to the Editor

Lessons for Ukraine: How the International Radiation Therapy Community Can Respond and Support Both Now and in the Future

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To the Editor:

The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine promoted a huge outpouring of support. For many, the question was what to do and how to help. In the radiation therapy community, the challenges our Ukrainian colleagues would face were all too clear: how to maintain radiation therapy services in a war.

The World Health Organization (WHO) Emergency Committee realized the unique challenges radiation therapy would face and so reached out to the Global Coalition for Radiotherapy (GCR) for support. Through the GCR’s global network, the radiation therapy community joined forces with the European Cancer Organisation and American Society of Clinical Oncology Special Network on the Impact of the War in Ukraine on Cancer. The response from professionals, societies, organizations, and industry was as fast as it was phenomenal. The Global Coalition for Radiotherapy Emergency Task Force was formed. Within weeks, this network was able to curate needs with the help of the Ukrainian Association of Medical Physicists and many others, as the global community came together to help devise solutions. A summary of the position to date has been published in The Lancet Oncology. The Global Coalition for Radiotherapy Emergency Task Force website also provides regular updates on the ever-changing situation: Ukraine | GCR (globalradiotherapy.org).

The challenges in Ukraine for a technical specialty such as radiation therapy are many: internal displacement of people (7 million people, according to the UNHCR UN Refugee Agency, and 13 million people stranded in affected areas)


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advocating, donations, etc). Coordination needs to rely on accurate, real-time information from legitimate sources. The entire radiation therapy community can respond to these needs as they work as one: clinicians, physicists, technicians, industry, societies, and advocates. Radiation therapy is a small community, but with the amplifier of technology, both virtual and remote, solutions can be suggested and implemented.

Radiation therapy is needed in approximately 50% of patients with cancer and in approximately 40% of cures. Worldwide, there is an underinvestment in radiation therapy. We need to future-proof the world against global disasters—wars, climate and nuclear disasters, and pandemics—which will surely interrupt cancer services. We must also develop the way the global community can respond. In radiation therapy, the emergency task force has shown how agile the community can be by working together inclusively. For those willing to help and to provide ideas and solutions, please join the Global Coalition for Radiotherapy Emergency Task Force and help us support Ukraine and surrounding countries.