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Marianne O'Hare: Welcome to Conversations on Health Care with Mark Masselli and Margaret Flinter. This week from a primary care clinic inside Rivne, Ukraine, we welcome Dr. Kateryna Pochtar who says between frequent air raids and trips to the bomb shelters, they are determined to provide continued healthcare to their patients.

Dr. Kateryna Pochtar: My patients are scared. They are crying in my office. As for me, I am not scared, but I worried about my family.

Marianne O'Hare: We end with a bright idea improving health and well being in everyday lives. Now, here are your hosts, Mark Masselli and Margaret Flinter.

Mark Masselli: The whole world is watching Ukraine as Russian President Putin's invasion defies all international norms. Beyond the diplomatic and military crisis there's also a severe humanitarian and healthcare situation we must all recognize and try to deal with right now.

Margaret Flinter: Here to help us understand is Dr. Kateryna Pochtar, a primary care physician in the Western Ukraine City of Rivne where she works in a large clinic, what we might think of in United States as a community health center. We are so delighted to have her here today.

Mark Masselli: Dr. Pochtar it goes without saying, but it must be said, our thoughts and prayers are with you and your fellow Ukrainians. Let's start and have you tell the audience of where you are right now and what it look like outside, perhaps just set the scene for us so we can have a better understanding.

Dr. Kateryna Pochtar: Hello everyone. My name is Dr. Kateryna Pochtar, Kater for short. I am grateful for you for the invitation here and thanks for your prayers and thoughts about Ukraine. I live in Rivne and as you said I work in the clinic as a primary care doctor. There is a war in Ukraine. Russia is attacking our country. They are bombing our cities, killing our people, killing our children. The houses are destroyed, hospitals are destroyed, kindergartens are destroyed.

Compared with southern and eastern part of Ukraine, Rivne is a safe place at the moment. Our medical center is safe. There is a bomb shelter in the ground floor. My colleagues and me keep doing our best to take care of our patients. Everyone is on his/her work place. When we here an air alarm we go downstairs to the bomb shelter. Patients and medical staff are staying in the bomb shelter as along as it is needed. Then we come back to our offices and continue and again and again we work, hide, work, hide.

My patients are scared. They are crying in my office. As for me, I am not scared, but I worried about my family. I am thinking about them

all the time. My parents and my brother and his wife and little son are in small town, Enerhodar. There is a nuclear power plant there. Russians are just on the entrance of this city. People are hiding. It's unbelievable, nuclear power plant it's so dangerous to attack this town, but anyway. My kids are with their grandmother in the village also hiding. I can't see them, I can't hug them, I can't feel them, they need my love and support so much, but I am so far. This is how we are working and living these days.

Mark Masselli: Thank you.

Margaret Flinter: Well, Dr. Pochtar, we can't say that we understand and that we have never been through this, but we can say that we send you our deepest empathy and want to really make sure we can get your messages out to all our listeners and also just continue to share with people what you are going through. I am so glad that you are not yet hit. We hope you will not be hit in your polyclinic, but when you described this, hide and come back to work, hide and come back to work, we know the stress is enormous.

I can't help, but wonder if you aren't going to be called into service to participate as a surgery lead for the hospitals and clinics that are hurt. Are you preparing for that, you anticipate the patient will be transferred to you who've been wounded in the attacks? Do you have any access capacity in terms of supplies and materials and staff to be able to accept people from other areas? Tell us a little bit about that.

Dr. Kateryna Pochtar: Most of Rivne Hospitals are preparing to accept a large number of injured patients. Yeah, they are ready. As for all medicines and supplies, I'm just a primary care doctor and I can't tell you exact information. If you want to know about our needs, I can contact the administration and give you this information. As for our medical center, we have enough of medicines at the moment. I don't know what will be going to happen tomorrow. Might be we will have some break. Okay.

Mark Masselli: No problem. Can you tell us about how the Ministry of Health is doing in its ability to help coordinate healthcare support across the country? Has that communication been broken off or are you able to -- is the large health system able to communicate across the country?

Dr. Kateryna Pochtar: Ministry of Health communicates with us, but also we Ukrainians quickly and efficiently organized ourselves. We have volunteer centers, and everyday administration and volunteer centers are share the list of medicines and other stuff that are needed. People bring such stuff to volunteer centers. Rivne region helps to other regions of Ukraine with this stuff because other regions really need supply.

Margaret Flinter: Dr. Pochtar, we know the backbone of your polyclinic, in particular

with your focus on primary care, of course, is its staff, your doctors and your nurses, your respiratory therapist, your pharmacist, keeping people able to move forward, resilient while they know that their own families are suffering is one of the great leadership challenges of any of us in health care. Tell us maybe a little bit about how you are keeping your staff as your polyclinic able to move forward, are you meeting regularly as a group? Is there is no time for that? Are people trying to support each other? Have you had staff who had to leave and go out of country to be with their families? Maybe share a little bit about the experience of your staff at the polyclinic.

Dr. Kateryna Pochtar: We are doing our best to support each other. We are doing our best to support our patients, and also patients support us and we really appreciate it. They asked, what do you need, can I help with something? Of course, we do not have some skills. We don't know how to support correctly in such specific situation, but we just do our best. Speak with each other, asked do you need something, how are you, and it really helps.

Mark Masselli: Well that is so important and it raises the question about every ones' mental health and whether or not there is enough support to provide for people who are in treatment for depression or anxiety. What are you able to do and are there any other types of interventions that could be helpful, perhaps telehealth or other ways to give some relief to the population, not only the population, but also to the work force at the clinic?

Dr. Kateryna Pochtar: Of course, everyone is stressed in Ukraine right now. Of course, it provokes different disorders, anxiety attacks, depression, decompensation of chronic disease and I am talking about patients and also I am talking about doctors, nurses. Of course, we have some knowledge and skills how to assist in such situations, and we do our best, but we have some problems.

For example, some people are afraid to go out because an air alarm could start on the way to the clinic and what to do, where to hide, that's why some patients haven't got access to medical care. We just do not know what will happen tomorrow, and so we are stressed and upset a little bit.

Margaret Flinter: Well the stress level must be just extraordinary for you, for your coworkers and for all of your patients and all of the people in Ukraine. I was struck in your opening comments when you talked about how you are responding, hiding as you need to, coming back out to the clinic when you can.

I heard that you've gotten some training from European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations group known as ECHO. Tell us has this been helpful? Was that all just very recently or have

you had that kind of emergency preparedness planning along the way that gave you at least some structure for how to respond in this situation today?

Dr. Kateryna Pochtar: ECHO gives us necessary knowledge and skills. We have Zoom meetings every two weeks. We listen to speakers and discuss problems with colleagues. Every one can ask some question and get an answer. Due to ECHO I feel my colleagues support and it inspires me. I really appreciate such Zoom meetings and thank you.

Mark Masselli: Well, we have -- our organizations have known each other for five years working on an ECHO with Dr. Rick Altice and we also give thanks to Dr. Sanjeev Arora who is the founder of ECHO, but it's been so important for all of us as it important tool at all times, but more important in this times.

I do want to sort of note that US Agency for International Development has sent disaster response team to Poland. It's coordinating the regional humanitarian response. Our state department is also providing nearly \$54 million in additional assistance. But tell us on the ground what more can we do, what's most critical in your mind in terms of the support people can provide around the world.

Dr. Kateryna Pochtar: It's hard to say. I'm just a doctor, I'm not politic or military or a head of hospital. Our greatest hope is to stop the war, and of course I think we will need some supply of medicines. It is enough right now, but it is only beginning, the seventh day of the war. We appreciate the support of the entire world which stand with Ukraine and it is really important for us.

Margaret Flinter: Dr. Pochtar I hope you feel that support. We want to keep this line of communication open with you. Here in the United States there is a national network of community health centers, they care for almost 40 million people. I know that they are going to be very focused on what you are experienced and going through and in terms of knowledge or skills and other tangible resources I know that we stand ready to try and help you.

I wonder if I could just ask when these things happened, it's not like your weren't already fully busy doing what you were doing to try and meet the healthcare needs of the people that your polyclinic serves. I understand COVID has been hugely problematic in your country as in the United States. You likely have thousands of people with COVID today, babies continued to born, people have their emergencies. Do you feel like that level of what we call that the daily care, right, the nuts and bolts, do you have enough to continue with that work that people are accounting on you for?

Dr. Kateryna Pochtar

Dr. Kateryna Pochtar: We are ready to continue all that we did before and we do our best for doing it. Everyone is on his/her workplace. We work as we work before. I want to tell you that on my work I feel better, seriously. When I'm alone at home it isn't comfortable and here it's like an illusion of usual life.

Mark Masselli: Well, thank you Dr. Pochtar and your are, as all Ukrainians are, so brave in this moment and we want to thank our audience for joining us to talk about this Russian invasion. Also we're going to post for all Americans to see ways that you can help the Ukrainian people. Again, thank you so much and to your collages in your clinic, thank them for their bravery and the work they do.

Dr. Kateryna Pochtar: Thank you.

Mark Masselli: Well thank you for making time. We will really appreciate it and it's such a tragedy and as you said the most important thing is to end the war.

Margaret Flinter: Mark, I think we and all our colleagues can appreciate that in the midst of this there is comfort in being able to provide the kind of help that people need. I so appreciate what Dr. Pochtar and her colleague are doing to continue everyday serving on the frontlines of healthcare.

Mark Masselli: Yeah, and I think all of our colleagues who work in community health centers who are healthcare provider, I think we were just -- our heart went out when she said hide and then work, hide and work.

Margaret Flinter: Hide, work, and missing your family all the while.

Mark Masselli: Yeah. Thank you Kateryna, thank you so much. We'll stay in touch and look forward to hearing from you on things that we can do as the situation evolves.

Dr. Kateryna Pochtar: I hope everything will be all right and we will won. We will do anything to protect our native country. Thank you, bye.

Mark Masselli: Good bye.

Margaret Flinter: Thank you.