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University Medical Center Schleswig-Holstein – contribution in development of Ukrainian medicine and support in the war time

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The key areas of scientific and practical cooperation between the University of Lübeck, the University Clinic of Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), Danylo Halytsky Lviv National Medical University and hospitals of Ukraine are presented. The active position of the University Clinic Schleswig-Holstein (UKSH) made it possible to organize the transfer of significant humanitarian aid to Ukraine during the full-scale invasion of Russia.

Keywords: War medicine, Ukraine, cooperation, humanitarian aid.

Cooperation between the University of Lübeck, the University Clinic of Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), Danylo Halytsky Lviv National Medical University and hospitals of Lviv began in peacetime. Since 2014, the university clinic has supported close cooperation with medical and educational institutions in Ukraine.

The critical areas of scientific and practical support of UKSH are the development of oncology care, minimally invasive surgery, and transplantology in Ukraine. The initiator of cooperation with Ukrainian clinics and medical universities is doctor Hryhoriy Lapshyn, who was born, studied, and began his career in Ukraine and now heads the transplant surgery section of the Schleswig-Holstein University Clinic on the Lübeck campus. The director of the surgery clinic, professor Tobias Keck, visited Ukraine six times with master classes, operations, and lectures and participated in conferences. Since 2014, more than 60 doctors from Ukraine have completed internships at the surgery clinic at the Schleswig-Holstein University Clinic, Lübeck campus, among them employees of the Lviv National Medical University and Lviv hospitals. Free participation in international conferences, symposia, and master classes organized by the surgery clinic was scheduled for Ukrainian colleagues. For his merits in improving the qualifications of Ukrainian doctors and students, Professor Tobias Keck was awarded the title of honorary professor at Kyiv (2019), Vinnytsia (2020), Ivano-Frankivsk (2021), and Bukovinian (2022) national medical universities. For many years of cooperation with Ukrainian medical and scientific institutions and contributing to the development of Ukrainian medicine, Hryhoriy Lapshyn received the title of honorary professor of Vinnytsia (2020) and Bukovinian (2022) national medical universities, as well as honorary doctor of Kyiv National Medical University (2021).

In October 2020, eight trucks with medical furniture and equipment, which were no longer used in connection with the move of the Schleswig-Holstein University Clinic to newly built and renovated buildings on the Kiel and Lübeck campuses, were transferred to hospitals in Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Khmelnytskyi and Chernivtsi [1].

In January 2021, the Schleswig-Holstein University Clinic (UKSH), in cooperation with Ukrainian universities, successfully held a virtual symposium as part of the German-Ukrainian summit on the development of transplantology in Ukraine. More than 700 guests from 17 countries took part in the seminar. Leading German specialists in transplantology prepared helpful reports for Ukrainian colleagues on technical, immunological, legislative, and organizational aspects of organ transplantation.

Minister of Health of Ukraine Maksym Stepanov thanked Professor Jens Scholz, Director of UKSH, for supporting the development of medicine in his country and building a stable and robust system of transplantology in Ukraine. Words of gratitude were also sent by the Embassy of Ukraine in Germany [2].

With the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine, the Schleswig-Holstein University Clinic and the University of Lübeck started a campaign to collect humanitarian aid for Ukrainian hospitals. As a sign of solidarity with the Ukrainian people, the main thoroughfare of the Schleswig-Holstein University Clinic has been illuminated in blue-yellow colors since the beginning of the war. The charity foundation of the clinic "Do good" (Gutes tun), which is engaged in financing innovative and creative projects, has directed its activities to help the medical institutions of Ukraine since the beginning of the war. Fundraising information is disseminated through work emails, regular newsletters, the clinic's monthly print edition, and information boards in hospital corridors. Each employee has the opportunity "with one click" to transfer a voluntary donation to help Ukraine and monitor the daily update of the account status [3,4]. Funds to help Ukraine are collected by schoolchildren selling baked goods and drinks and also by sports organizations, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs of the region. Each donation is listed with a personal gratitude on the foundation's website. For the most efficient planning of purchases and organization of assistance in the clinic, a special commission was created, which considers the needs and requests of Ukrainian colleagues and looks for ways to order the necessary things quickly.

In the first months of the war twice a month, and now every month, a truck with humanitarian aid leaves the UKSH clinic to the Ukrainian border. As of November 2022, 12 medical equipment trucks and medicines were sent to Ukrainian hospitals.

The active position of the university clinic during the crisis caused a broad resonance in the local mass media, and large companies, philanthropists, and the government of the state of Schleswig-Holstein joined the campaign. For example, the Dräger company and the government of the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein handed over 25 anesthetic breathing machines, 52 artificial lung ventilation machines, numerous incubators for newborns, and consumables for their maintenance.



(a)



(b)

Figure 1. (a) Meeting of the patrons of the Schleswig-Holstein University Clinic charity fund. Hryhoriy Lapshyn talks about the organization of humanitarian aid to Ukrainian hospitals; (b) the main thoroughfare of the UKSH clinic on the Kiel campus in the colors of the Ukrainian flag. Photo from the official page of UKSH

The total value of monetary income from donations and medical equipment collected by the Schleswig-Holstein University Clinic for hospitals in Ukraine is 4.2 million euros [3,4].

Ukrainians who found temporary shelter in Germany during the war can receive free medical care at the Schleswig-Holstein University Clinic. "Our responsibility is to provide treatment for patients who can no longer receive medical care in Ukraine and are forced to leave their country because of the war", - said the director of UKSH, professor Jens Scholz [5].

From February 2022 till today, about 2,000 citizens of Ukraine have received inpatient and outpatient treatment at the clinic, including children and adults with oncological diseases and soldiers who were wounded in the war. Ukrainian patients with tuberculosis are treated in the newly built Leibniz Pulmonology Clinic at the Kiel Campus, UKSH. For Ukrainian patients with surgical and oncological problems who received temporary shelter in Germany, a free consultation organized by the Ukrainian staff of the clinic is held every Wednesday at the surgery clinic on the Lübeck campus, UKSH [6].

The "Nu(m)Ukraine" subsidiary project of the all-German NAPKON project has been launched for Ukrainians in the infectious disease clinic of the Kiel campus. For Ukrainians who found temporary shelter during the war in the city of Kiel, German and Ukrainian doctors of the UKSH Infectious Diseases Clinic offer diagnostics and explanations about vaccination. Participation in the project is voluntary and involves a preliminary examination and, if necessary, further treatment [7].

In May 2022, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, and the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Ukraine in Germany, Andrii Melnyk, paid a special visit to the Schleswig-Holstein University Clinic. High-ranking officials were highly impressed by the scale of the clinic's support of Ukrainian hospitals during the war and visited Ukrainian patients treated at the clinic. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, expressed hope for further cooperation with the clinic in reconstructing Ukrainian hospitals after the victory. Andriy Melnyk noted: "We felt the reliable support of the UKSH clinic even before the war. And today we never get tired of repeating - thank you" [8,9].



(a)



(b)

Figure 2. Visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine in Germany Andrii Melnyk to UKSH in May 2022. (a) the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, and the director of the UKSN clinic, prof. Jens Scholz; (b) communication with Ukrainian employees of the clinic. Photo from the official page of UKSH

The clinic's active position in organizing humanitarian aid to Ukraine received broad resonance in German society. For the organization of the campaign "UKSH helps Ukraine" in 2022, the clinic received the prestigious KU Awards and the special award "Angel of Health"[10].

For a significant contribution to the development of Ukrainian medicine and assistance to the hospitals of Ukraine during the war in November 2022 at the solemn meetings of the Academic Councils of the Danylo Halytsky Lviv National Medical University and Bogomolets Kyiv National University, the honorary title "Doctor Honoris Causa" was awarded to Professor Jens Scholz, the general director of the Schleswig-Holstein University Clinic. In addition, Professor Jens Scholz is an honorary professor at the Bukovian National Medical University.

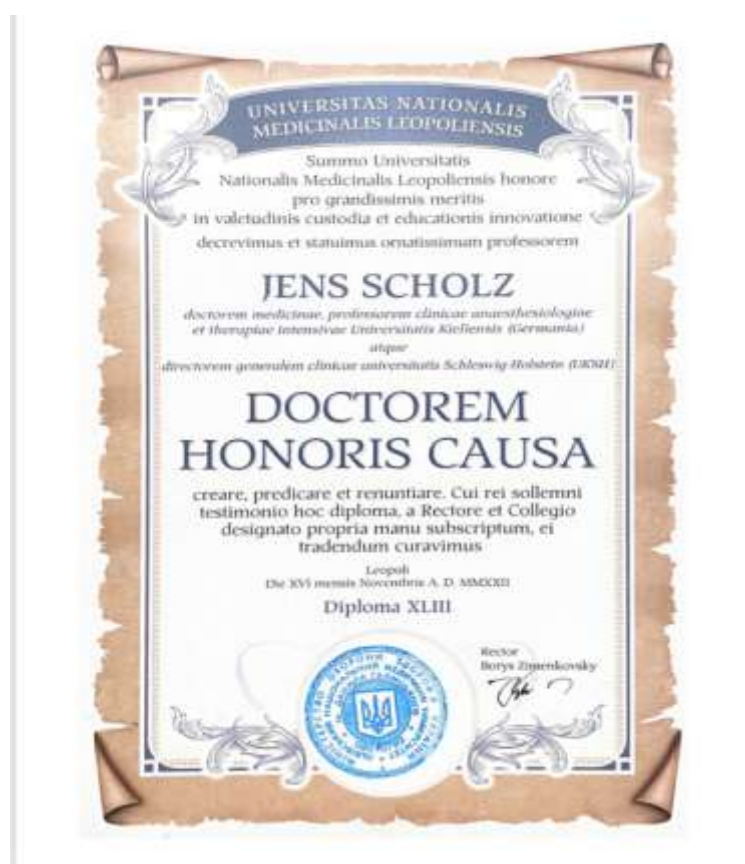


Figure 3. Diploma on awarding the honorary title "Doctor Honoris Causa" Professor Jens Scholz (Kiel, Germany)

As clinic employees, we are deeply moved by the support during this difficult time. We would never be tired of expressing gratitude to the German people and the Schleswig-Holstein University Clinic.

Supplementary Materials: Video S1 - <https://youtu.be/IdY9L5X8Iiw>

Institutional Review Board Statement: "Not applicable"

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