

The “Ophthalmic Hub” - Six Years of Ophthalmological Congress Education in Kiev

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What does six years mean to you? About 2190 days? Six times spring, summer, autumn and winter? Six birthdays and six Christmases, maybe? Yes?

Please keep in mind that the six years between 2018 and 2023 were different, very different. For the whole world, and especially for Ukraine. There was the outbreak of COVID, sparking a fundamental rethinking of our social interaction that took place in 2020. That time was characterized by strict regulations, lockdowns, physical distance, and the acceptance of virtual meetings.

In 2022, COVID had lost some of its great horror. Folks tried to get back to a lifestyle that was reminiscent of the previous norm. But on February 24th, in violation of international law, the war, which began in 2014 at the latest, including the annexation of the Crimean Island, developed into a large-scale Russian military attack on Ukraine.

The continuity of life for the ordinary person was difficult to achieve in those six years - especially in Ukraine. Defying this headwind, Prof. Oksana Vitovska managed to plan and execute the “Ophthalmic Hub” congress, which she established in 2018. It was set up as an annual conference: face-to-face for the first two years, then online or hybrid. The sixth Ophthalmic Hub took place in 2023 as a hybrid congress from November 24th to 25th, despite violent drone attacks on Kiev on those days.

Again, it was “no year like any other”. In a frightful way it demonstrated the extraordinary resilience of the Ukrainians.



Figure 1: Prof. Oksana Vitovska, Founder of “OphthalmicHUB” and president of “Ukrainian Alliance of Ophthalmologists”.

The OphthalmicHUB has established itself, in Ukraine and internationally, as a highly sophisticated scientific and educational event where representatives of all ophthalmological disciplines meet to discuss the most pressing issues in ophthalmology and related medical fields. As in previous years, the extensive program was spread across several lecture rooms in which the speakers spoke at the same time.

This year, the symposia by the individual international ophthalmological societies were once again integrated into the congress program. For example: one symposium was held by the Bulgarian Ophthalmological Society, another by the Lithuanian Ophthalmological Society, yet another by the Foundation for Ophthalmology as well as the Julius Hirschberg ophthalmic-historical Society.

A key feature of the Ophthalmic Hub is its multidisciplinary orientation. This year, the Ukrainian neuro-ophthalmological Society organized a sophisticated symposium where high-ranking Ukrainian experts in neurology and neurosurgery shared their knowledge. Also the subject of the session on medical law attracted great interest.

One of the main highlights of the conference, was the very first brainstorming session in which young ophthalmologists competed against each other in two teams. This was characterized not only by the high level of successful learning but also by a lot of fun and laughter.

Over the course of the six years, the content of the Ophthalmic Hub has evolved: the scientific program has become more diverse and therefore more interesting. This year many speakers spoke on AI (artificial intelligence) in ophthalmology, as these technologies are already available in Ukraine. The industry exhibition has also become more attractive and informative, many new devices and products were presented, one could get detailed information and practical advice. In last year’s sessions, marked by power outages, cold and great uncertainty, it was not possible to order or buy products. In comparison, the industry exhibition at this year’s congress offered a modern, wide range of products which were also available for purchase.



Figure 2: Prof. Oksana Vitovska together with Ukrainian speakers and participants.

Not only was the scientific scope of the event impressive, but also the number of participants and speakers: The great longing for a face-to-face congresses providing personal exchange was reflected in the high number of participants on-site: more than 600 participants took part on-site in Kiev. Around 1,500 were online, as well, the congress was streamed over 28,000 times via YouTube. The extensive program featured 104 speakers from Ukraine and 38 foreign speakers from 17 countries (USA, Egypt, Turkey, Romania, Italy, Germany, Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, India, Lithuania, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Portugal, Poland, Great Britain).



Figure 3: A crowded conference room in Kyiv.

From the outside, this Ophthalmic Hub once again appeared to be a well-organized and conducted congress with minimal technical disruptions (which are considered completely normal in our modern online world) and which were hardly noticeable. However, it is important to remember that Russia carried out a large-scale attack on Kiev with over 70 drones on the night from Friday to Saturday and that the participants, speakers and organizers spent a large part of the night huddled in chilly bunkers. Nevertheless, the second day of the congress began promptly at 8 a.m. on Saturday.

After-the-Congress is Before-the-Congress. Preparations have already started for the Ophthalmic Hub in 2024. However, that congress is designed, Prof. Oksana Vitovska and her team are ready to anticipate the solutions to all possible imponderables.

More information about the Ophthalmic Hub: <https://ophthalmic-hub.com.ua/hub-eng>.

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