

2024: Ophthalmology in Ukraine

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Since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 (over 700 days ago), enormous damage has been inflicted upon Ukraine's economy, as well as to its citizens and its health workers. It has also affected how the health system is funded, as well as the amount of resources available for healthcare.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has occasioned more than a thousand attacks on the healthcare system -- around two attacks per day.

- 148 medical workers have been killed (as of 14 July 2023).
- 106 healthcare workers were injured.
- More than 400 attacks that damaged or destroyed hospitals.

(<https://www.statista.com/topics/9087/russia-ukraine-war-2022/#topicOverview>).

Unfortunately, statistics do not provide information on how many ophthalmologists were among the victims. What is known comes from personal communications with colleagues at the front. The same goes for those individuals forced to leave Ukraine.

Nevertheless, eye care in Ukraine remains strong in these difficult times: The facilities are being restored. Ukrainian ophthalmologists have received strong support from European, Canadian and USA ophthalmological societies and from nongovernmental organizations (NGO). They help with instruments, materials, and medicine.

Today, Ukraine's specialists continue to work in all regions of the country, organizing mobile teams in areas where people do not have access to medical services (like Kherson, Kharkiv and Sumy). In areas where there is a lack of specialists and equipment, they open new private medical offices and centers. This is the best evidence of their belief in a victory.

When we talk about recovery, it's not just about facilities. A significant part of the recovery is about the continuing development of the medical staff, our colleagues and doctors. The Ukrainian Alliance of ophthalmologists (<http://ophthalmolog.kiev.ua/>) continues to evolve new methods of professional development for eye specialists. The Alliance created an innovative educational chatbot, Dr.Ophtik, which became a platform for education, conversation and support (https://t.me/DrOphtik_bot).



Figure 1: The mascot representing Dr.Ophtik as congresses (here together with Prof. Oksana Vitovska).

Online webinars (Ophthalmic iSchool) are organized on a regular basis. Through these YouTube-webinars, the doctors share interesting cases and hold discussions with experts and the audience with questions and comments in real time.

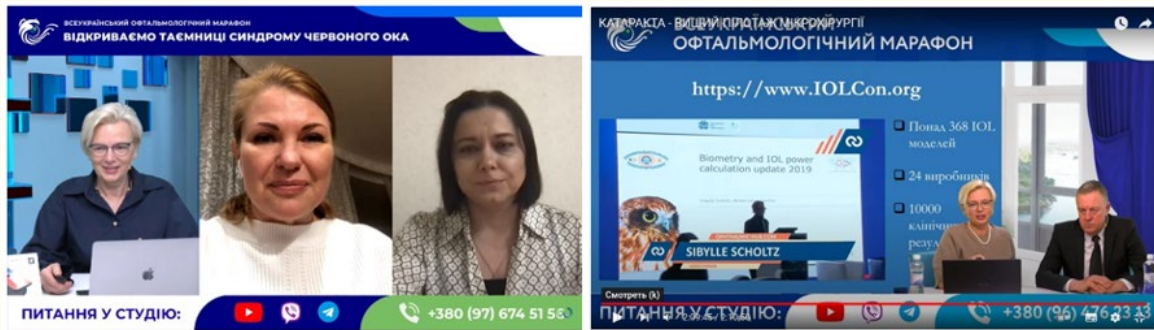


Figure 2a and 2b: Screenshots from iSchool webinars.

This year, the biggest congress of Ukrainian ophthalmologists, OphthalmicHub (<https://ophthalmic-hub.com.ua/hub-eng>), will be held in Kyiv, both live and virtual, on 25-26 October 2024.



Figure 3: Prof. Oksana Vitovska at OphthalmicHub 2023.



Figure 4: Latest technology presented at Ophthalmic Hub 2023 (like this virtual reality training tool).



Figure 5: Packed conference room at Ophthalmic Hub in Kyiv 2023.

Traditionally, the OphthalmicHub brings specialists and business together to discuss modern technology as well as urgent problems facing Ukrainian ophthalmology.

Perhaps no one expected how strong the Ukrainian army would be, as well as the people’s will to resist. The women and men who fight on the front lines and risk their lives every day for Ukraine and Europe have earned the deepest respect. The resilience, commitment, and confidence of the Ukrainians is immense: Despite the cruelty that war inflicts, Ukrainian ophthalmologists continue to educate themselves as well as take care of their patients.

Слава Україні - Slawa Ukrajini - Glory to Ukraine!



Figure

*<https://pixabay.com/de/vectors/ukraine-flagge-frieden-taube-krieg-7043528/>