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Devastated By Russian Strike, Kyiv's Largest Children's Hospital Starts Long Road to Reconstruction

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Buildings of children's hospital Okhmatdyt in Kyiv after Russian missile attack on Ukraine on 8 July 2024.
State Emergency Service of Ukraine

KYIV — Before it was ripped apart by a Russian missile strike last month, the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital treated about 700 patients daily.

Today, Ukraine's largest children's hospital operates at roughly 60% capacity.

One month after the devastating strike that killed at least 42 people, including five children, global headlines have moved on. Yet for Kyiv and Okhmatdyt, the arduous reconstruction process has yet to begin.

Hospital director Volodymyr Zhovnir estimates the damages of the July 8 strike, which damaged six of Okhmatdyt's buildings, could amount to several hundred million dollars.

Its staff are determined to restore the hospital to its former state. At the same time, the Ukrainian and international communities have rallied to raise funds.

Zhovnir, who narrowly escaped the attack, is still haunted by memories of that day. He recounted the fear and chaos to The Moscow Times.

"I felt fear, I was afraid that so many children, so many mothers would be killed here," he said.

He pointed to the heroic efforts of medical workers, emergency responders and volunteers who saved many lives amid the devastation.

"I tried to save more people, and I'm so happy that our medical workers did everything to save our patients," he said. "They [finished] surgeries that were in progress at the time of the explosion. They do everything, everybody around the explosion did. And I am so happy that not so many people were killed. It's big work [that we do], our doctors, our police, our firemen and volunteers."

Among the victims were a young female doctor and a father waiting during his son's surgery. Over 300 people, including staff and patients, sustained injuries widely ranging in severity.

Several of the hospital buildings are now mere shells of their former state. Though spared the worst, the main hospital building suffered significant damage including shattered windows, a compromised facade and dangling light fixtures.

Other buildings have been closed due to the risk of collapse and severe damage, with critical systems like power and oxygen destroyed.

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"Many people and colleagues are just tired," said Pavlo Andreev, the head of the rehabilitation department at Okhmatdyt. "On the one hand ... it's psychologically tiring, but from the other side, it's physical because we have a lot of work to do to renew the hospital, while other colleagues need to review the operations, surgical departments, the ICU department, etc., which [are] very important for our hospital."

For many of the hospital staff who have returned to work, the rewards of helping their patients as well as the global support have given them the motivation to continue despite the injuries and psychological trauma they sustained.

"All of our staff, they have first of all some hatred towards the Russian Federation and so much energy to do something" to help "the patients [who are] coming back to this hospital," Andreev said.

Okhmatdyt director Zhovnir told The Moscow Times that the hospital had to "evacuate 400 patients to different city hospitals."

Foreign governments evacuated dozens of other patients abroad to receive treatment that only Okhmatdyt could previously provide.

The Ukrainian public and government continue to work to raise international support for Okhmatdyt. This goes far beyond the efforts of doctors, staff and volunteers, with donations from foreign governments and private donors worldwide.

By July 24, the hospital had received around 600 million hryvnia ($14.6 million) in donations. An Instagram post two days later garnered over $16 million in contributions.

“Our embassies and diplomats are already working as hard as possible to attract international assistance to restore the destroyed premises and equipment,” Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said in a statement. “The Ukrainian state will do everything to restore as soon as possible the stable operation of this hospital, which is known to everyone in Ukraine and which really saves lives.”

For now, despite operating far below its original capacity, Okhmatdyt Children’s Hospital will begin its long task of reconstruction and continue its mission, for which the name and abbreviation “Okhmatdyt” stands: the Protection of Mothers and Children.

“I very [much] hope that in one, not more than two years, the hospital will be rebuilt, but it will happen slowly,” Zhovnir said. “Maybe we will renovate the new building in the next half year, but I don't know about the other buildings. So much is absolutely destroyed.”

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