

Other Areas of Practice

How to help Ukrainian health professionals | Brooke Shekter

By **Brooke Shekter**

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(March 9, 2022, 1:44 PM EST) -- The unjustified and abhorrent terror on Ukraine is an attempt to wipe out the history of Ukraine. Erasing history is how history will be permitted to repeat itself.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's unparalleled heroism has set the tone for this war. He is fighting for history, for democracy and for freedom *for all of us*. The least we can do is follow his lead.

So, what are we doing? The government of Canada has announced that it is providing an expedited immigration stream to allow Ukrainian refugees to come to Canada and to be able to work for any Canadian employer or enrol in an education program. This is not enough.

For those of us here in Canada with higher education and resources, what can we do to help Ukrainian refugees once they arrive in Canada?

War does not discriminate according to profession. The influx of refugees will undoubtedly include regulated health professionals such as doctors, nurses, psychologists, midwives, dentists, physiotherapists, dietitians, etc., or those who aspire to become a regulated health professional.

The regulated health colleges ought to be providing an expedited process *now* to integrate qualified Ukrainian professionals into our health-care system. Aside from it being the right thing to do, which is the only reason necessary, it is also something that our exhausted health-care system needs.

We can also expect to see people who will need health care, on both an urgent and ongoing basis, but who do not speak English or French. This will mean that our health-care system will require an increase of Ukrainian-speaking health professionals who will be able to provide health care to an already vulnerable patient population. Perhaps a way to assist Ukrainian professionals in meeting the requisite qualifications would be to initially integrate them as translators for refugees needing medical care when they arrive in Canada.

Similar considerations should apply for Ukrainian refugees who were in the middle of studying to become a regulated health professional before terror forced them out of their sovereign nation. There must be a way to allow these students to easily continue their education here in Canada, a country with such a robust university culture.

One of the most obvious issues, to start, will be the language barrier. In addition to streamlining the qualification process for certificates of registration, colleges should also provide free English (or French) proficiency courses to allow qualified Ukrainians to practise their profession here. A free language program should also be offered to students (and prospective students) of the regulated professions who wish to enrol in education.

The free English proficiency program ought to run concurrently with any other requisite, but with streamlined qualification requirements, so that we do *not* require refugees to take years to learn the language and then years to pass the qualifying exams. The point is to enable Ukrainian refugees to quickly be able to contribute to society and feed their families.

This type of integration process will be necessary in every province, not just Ontario. Which regulated health profession and which province is going to kick-start this plan? Once we have a plan for one regulated health profession, the other professions across the provinces can follow suit. Such a plan would require legal advice on how to amend the requirements to provide an expedited stream.

As part of the integration plan, and to bridge the gap, employers could receive financial support from the Ontario government to hire qualified Ukrainian refugees as regulated professionals. That would be similar to the way the province, currently, financially supports the Physician Assistant Career Start Program.

The process for integrating Ukrainian regulated health professionals or students of regulated professions cannot be arduous or arbitrarily covered in red tape; that would be an utter failure for a country boasting about accepting Ukrainian refugees into the country. Accepting them means helping them. It means providing the infrastructure necessary to support them, after they have lost everything. "They" are not different from us. They are us. These are people who were living in a sovereign country with an elected president. We need to do more.

Brooke Shekter is a lawyer with TTL Health Law. Her practice focuses on administrative law and professional discipline. Shekter earned her juris doctor from Western Law.

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