

Potential of Medical Students for Ukrainian Refugees in COVID-19 Pandemic

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In response to the situation in Russia and Ukraine, the United Kingdom (UK) and many other European countries are accepting Ukrainian refugees.¹ As of May, 2022, more than 4 million people have managed to leave Ukraine,¹ but their grief and suffering is immeasurable, and even after evacuation, people are reported to be at high risk of suffering from conflict-related stress disorders,

depression, and anxiety disorders.² Refugees are also prone to social isolation, a risk factor for mental health problems due to differences in language, environment, and culture,³ and require proper support.

However, in the UK, restrictions against COVID-19 were lifted on February 24, and the number of infected and hospitalized patients has shown an increasing trend, beginning to put a strain on the medical environment, and healthcare professionals are being forced to deal with COVID-19 patients.⁴ Consequently, the refugees may not be able to get the timely care and support both mentally and physically. Moreover, this problem could happen anywhere in the world, as long as there is no telling when the re-expansion of COVID-19 may occur.

Medical students may be able to assist refugees and make up for the lack of medical resources. In the UK, medical students actually assisted medical professionals and patients during the COVID-19 outbreak, and their effectiveness has been reported.⁵ Similar to this experience, we believe that medical students could be incorporated as part of the medical team for refugees by, for example, providing

video communication to refugees and their families, measuring routine clinical outcomes, listing and delivering daily medications, and training in self-compassion through communication among the refugees. However, we also need to be careful because medical students may misjudge what they can do in the chaos of the field and make the wrong interventions. Since medical students vary in ability from lower to higher grades, it is necessary to clarify in advance the support that each student can take according to their abilities and to share the details that must be discussed with doctors and nurses to prevent mistakes. In addition, refugees may feel insecure about whether they can receive adequate support from medical students, and it is important to explain the situation to them in advance and establish mutual consent. It is essential for all countries accepting refugees to put in place a system for cooperation and collaboration between medical students and medical institutions to minimize the impact of secondary damage to the refugees in advance.

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