

Introduction

This issue of the “Zeszyty Naukowe Ochrony Zdrowia. Zdrowie Publiczne i Zarządzanie” is being published several months after the start of the new and highly devastating phase of the Russia–Ukraine war. This war began already in 2014 in a hybrid form, but on 24th of February 2022, with the brutal Russian aggression on Ukraine, it moved into the phase of open military conflict, with clashes (especially in the eastern and southern territories of Ukraine) resembling those of the Second World War. The reactions of other states and societies have been very diverse worldwide. Nevertheless, the war in Ukraine has become a crucial topic of interest for many stakeholders. The impacts of this war are multifaceted, they must and they do concern the whole world. It is for these reasons that the current issue of the Journal focuses on the Russia–Ukraine war.

The starting point for this set of materials was a critically important seminar titled “War in Ukraine and Public Health,” organized in a hybrid form on 20th of May 2022 in Gdansk by the Medical University of Gdansk together with the Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER). The five hour audio-video recording of this event is available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SV0IS3grpUw&t=15648s>). Due to the high importance of the topic, the participants of the seminar were asked to prepare written materials, which could be disseminated to a wider audience through the Journal. Some papers have taken the form of conference proceedings or commentaries, while others have been shaped into scientific papers. Altogether, they form a differentiated and important picture of the ongoing war in Europe, together with its consequences for the entire world.

In the first paper, Iryna Senyuta provides insight into the concept of medical neutrality, which can be defined as a social agreement obliging society to protect medical personnel both in times of war and peace, with medical personnel also compelled to provide medical care to everybody during the armed conflict, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, political affiliations or any other characteristics. The reflections on the topic are particularly important with regard to the specificity of the war in Ukraine – due to the high numbers of affected Ukrainian civilians (including children), medical personnel and health care facilities of all kinds killed or destroyed in Russian attacks, as well as the gross violations of the principles of medical neutrality from the aggressor’s side. Moreover, there is a fine line between the essence of the concept of medical neutrality and the professional activity of medical personnel working in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories, which adds to the complexity of this very important and up-to-date problem.

In the next paper, Igor Guschuk and Nataliia Oleksiuk describe the situation of the health care system in Ukraine, which now operates within the extremely difficult conflict environment. Concrete data and numbers have been provided, and although they change virtually every day, it is important to present a snapshot from a particular moment in time. It provides a means to visualize and comprehend the enormity of the burden and difficulty the Ukrainian health care system faces, often unimaginable for health care and public health professionals, as well as the general audience, currently living in states free from war. The data provided also reveals why the massive support from other countries is required to secure at least the basic humanitarian needs of the Ukrainian society withstanding the Russian aggression and protecting their homeland.

Henrique Lopes explains in his article why war harms and compromises all kinds of foundations and basic principles of contemporary public health, impacting even upon future generations. He provides an overview of the activities of ASPHER undertaken in the reaction to the war in Ukraine. The paper is based on the closing speech of the abovementioned seminar, organized in May 2022 in Gdansk. It sought to express ASPHER’s position on the current war in Ukraine, as well as a view on what should be done by schools of public health in this war’s context.

In the next paper, Tomasz Bochenek, Laurent Chambaud and Oleg Lozan characterize selected major impacts of the ongoing war in Ukraine on public health, as well as the reactions of the international academic public health community, especially from the three academic organizations they represent in Moldova, Poland and France, respectively. An overview of the multi-faceted impacts of the Russia–Ukraine war is provided, as well as a brief presentation of international cooperation and other initiatives of European schools of public health. The long-term cooperation of the academic public health community in the area of mitigating the impact of the Russian aggression on Ukraine is particularly important if we consider the prolonged character of this war, the changing overall geopolitical situation, and the devastating coincidence of the two major global crises on one hand the pandemic and on the other the war in Europe on a scale unseen since the Second World War. Both crises are negatively impacting the global public health security and humanitarian situation.

In the light of the new challenges and seeing the partial inadequacy of current public health academic curricula, unprepared to address the threats of war, Colette Cunningham and Lisa Wandschneider propose utilizing the WHO-ASPHER Competency Framework to newly frame public health education. This is aimed to meet the needs of public health and health care professionals for war and

peacebuilding. We are sure that this commentary is a start of a new movement to modernize and adapt the academic public health curricula, making them more suitable to the drastically changing global situation with the inevitable consequences for health care systems and public health.

We kindly invite the Readers of the “Zeszyty Naukowe Ochrony Zdrowia. Zdrowie Publiczne i Zarządzanie” to

acquaint themselves with all the materials on the war in Ukraine and its impacts, which have been provided by this pool of distinguished authors representing public health organizations from seven European countries.

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