

LI doc helps Ukrainians on video calls

Dermatologist and med student offer needed treatment

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Andrii Panasiuk was a Ukrainian soldier during Russia's 2014 invasion of the Crimean Peninsula when his entire team was gunned down by enemy forces. Panasiuk, the only survivor, was captured by the Russians and held captive for months before he was exchanged as part of a prisoner swap between the two nations.

Nearly a decade later, Panasiuk, living in Western Ukraine during yet another horrific war with Russia, continues to suffer with battlefield injuries, including the effects of the resection of part of his bowel, scarring to his lower back and traumatic damage to his right foot.

On Thursday, Panasiuk and his wife, Bogdana, connected with a Garden City dermatologist and his Ukrainian medical student for a virtual consultation as part of a unique free program providing support for Ukrainian citizens and refugees unable to access specialized care in their home country.

Dr. Navin Arora, who spent 12 years in the U.S. Army as a physician, including tours in Egypt and Baghdad, said Ukrainians living in the war zone or displaced throughout Europe are in need of care for both simple and

acute dermatologic ailments. Panasiuk, for example, suffered a severe contracture deformity in his right foot where he also lost his big toe due to shrapnel damage.

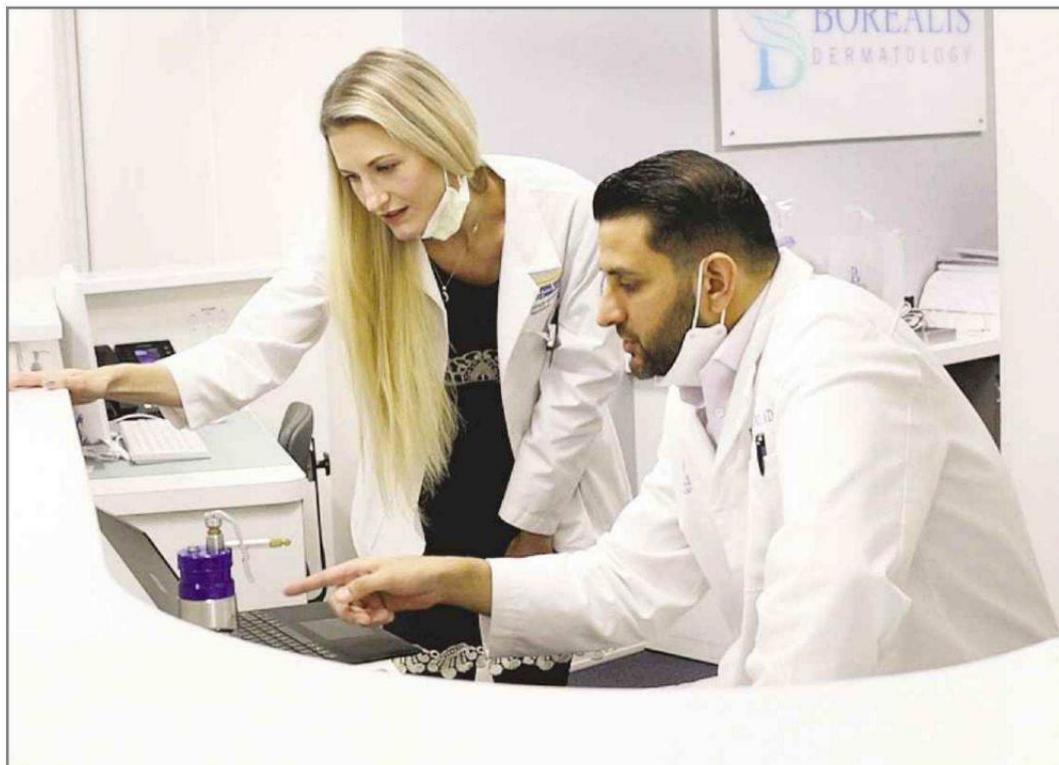
"We have a special skill and there's a need," Arora said before his consultation with Panasiuk where the two men connected over their shared military service. "And these civilians are in an unfortunate situation. Between the displacement of home facilities, loss of life and so forth, we have an opportunity to do something. And I think that's really important."

Conceiving a plan to help

Arora, working with medical student Viktoria Taranto, will meet on Zoom with patients where they will examine their injuries or ailments, discuss discomfort levels and recommend a course of treatment to be employed by their primary physician.

Taranto joined Arora's practice, which has offices in Garden City and Syosset, earlier this year as she pursues a degree at New York Institute of Technology's College of Osteopathic Medicine in Old Westbury. She grew up in Western Ukraine and moved to Levittown five years ago to pursue her medical degree. Most of Taranto's family still live in Ukraine.

When Arora learned of Taranto's background and connections to Ukraine, they conceived a plan to help underserved or displaced patients whose conditions are not immediately



Dr. Navin Arora, right, and medical student Viktoria Taranto hold a video consultation with a patient.

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connected to the ongoing war.

Many Ukrainians, they said, have trouble accessing specialized health care while others are afraid to visit hospitals that have been targeted by the Russian military. In other cases, a patient's regular dermatologist may not have electricity or could have fled the country, she said.

Since the program began four months ago, Arora and Taranto, who serves as a translator, have met with about 20 patients, often with chronic conditions.

Taranto solicits patients largely through word-of-mouth from family and friends back home and through social media.

"We have patients who are still in Ukraine. We have

Ukrainians who are abroad, mostly in Europe," Taranto said. "So this is very important because they don't have access to good care, especially such specialties as dermatology. . . . If it's something urgent, obviously they know where to go. But there are limited resources in terms of some specialties like dermatology."

Critical time in the conflict

The dermatology program, which appears to be unique for the region, is moving forward during a critical time in the Russia-Ukrainian conflict.

President Joe Biden met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House Wednesday, pledging to continue providing support for the U.S. ally. The Ukrainian leader then delivered a historic 32-minute address to U.S. lawmakers at the Capitol in Washington, D.C. Lawmakers are expected to vote this week on a

massive funding bill that includes nearly \$45 billion in aid to Ukraine.

U.S. military officials project that roughly 100,000 Ukrainians have been killed or injured since the war began in late February.

While some patients that Arora and Taranto meet with have complex injuries, others come with common conditions.

For example, Arora on Thursday met with Hanna Surovtceva, a Ukrainian refugee living in Denmark suffering with rosacea, a common skin condition that causes blushing and visible blood vessels on the face. He recommended a topical wash and cream that can be prescribed by a general physician.

"What's 20 minutes out of my day if we can make an impact in someone's well-being, at least for a little bit or longer, hopefully?" Arora said of the program. "And that's something special and fortunate that we can do."

Officials: Ex-LI butler, facing larceny charges, tried to flee U.S.

U.S. Customs officials in Boston arrested a former Southampton butler — wanted on charges of spending \$6,000 of his former employers' money on liquor — as he attempted to flee the country, authorities said.

James Mounsey, 34, of Ireland, who was facing grand larceny charges, was arrested Dec. 15 at Logan Airport by U.S. Customs

and Border Patrol officers, Southampton police said.

Mounsey purchased the liquor at a local liquor store June 22, using his former employers' information, two months after he had been fired, police said. A judge issued a warrant for his arrest Dec. 7.

Mounsey's attorney, Jason Bassett, called the account of at-

tempting to flee the country "categorically false." He said Mounsey has dual citizenship in the United States and Ireland and said police began asking about the case while he was abroad.

Bassett said he was working with police, but neither he nor Mounsey was aware of an active warrant. Mounsey had flown to Boston to visit friends

and was returning home when he was stopped and arrested at the airport.

Southampton Town detectives said they had arranged to have Mounsey turn himself in, but police said he fled.

The Suffolk County Fugitive Squad returned Mounsey to New York, where Suffolk County prosecutors charged him

with grand larceny, identity theft and possession of stolen property.

He was arraigned Friday in Suffolk County Court, where he pleaded not guilty. He was ordered to surrender his passport and placed on supervised release, Bassett said.

He is scheduled to return to court Feb. 2. — JOHN ASBURY