

CHERNOBYL CHILDREN'S PROJECT (UK)

ПОДДЕРЖКА ДЕТЯМ БЕЛАРУСИ

The Development of Children's Hospice Care in Gomel

In 1998 CCP began working with Anna Gorchakova, Director of the Belarusian Children's Hospice. The Hospice was supporting children in and around Minsk, and Anna was very keen to establish palliative care in other parts of the country.



Doctors in Gomel told us how much they would like to be able to support children at home, instead of having them die in hospital, which was distressing for these children, their families and other children having treatment in the same ward.

We brought Anna on a visit to the UK in spring 1999 to visit hospices and meet Macmillan nurses. In the autumn two nurses and a social worker from the UK came to spend a week in Minsk; and soon after we brought a nurse and social worker from Minsk to shadow British palliative care nurses in Liverpool and North Wales. These visits were all funded by the British Government's Know How Fund.

It was in 1999 that Anna told CCP Director Linda Walker, about a 15 year old girl who had been sent home from hospital when her treatment failed. The family lived in a village and when the girl's pain became very bad and the local doctor could not give her adequate pain killers, her father put her on his horse and cart to take her to hospital. She died before she could have the injection she needed so much.

This tragic story showed the urgency of setting up hospice care throughout the country so no child would have to suffer in this way.

On the same visit Linda met Igor Iscrov, a haematologist in Gomel. He told the story of a teenage boy he had been treating. The boy thought that he could not be cured and he wanted to go home and spend time with his family and friends, and go fishing. But Igor was determined to try to cure him so he kept him in hospital. The boy died and Igor regretted that he had not let him go home. 'It is our dream' he told us 'to be able to support children at home when their treatment is not successful.'

So Gomel Palliative Care Team was set up in January 2000, with Igor Iscrov as doctor, Zhanna Trizno as manager and with a nurse and psychologist, and with guidance from Anna Gorchakova.

In 2000 we received a grant from the Victor Zorza Hospice Trust which enabled us to buy medicines for Minsk Hospice and the team in Gomel, and to organise more visits for Hospice staff between Belarus and the UK for Hospice staff..

Vitebsk Hospice was set up in 2000 and CCP helped with initial salaries, but then other charities took on the role of supporting this Hospice.

In spring 2001 a nurse and social worker from Minsk spent time in North Wales and at Martin House Hospice in Yorkshire. In the autumn of that year we brought the doctor from the hospice team in Vitebsk and the manager and psychologist for our team in Gomel. They visited three children's hospices in England than met palliative care specialists in North Wales.

Early in 2002 Dr Igor Iscrov came to the UK to speak at a conference organised by the Belarusian Embassy. He also visited Great Ormond Street Hospital in London and Manchester Children's Hospital where he spoke to haematologists about some of the illnesses he was seeing in children in Gomel. They told him that further research should be done as they were conditions which are only seen in elderly people in the UK.

Igor's visit inspired him to want to extend hospice care to children outside the city of Gomel. In November 2002 we began funding a nurse in Mozyr (with support from a Chernobyl Children's Lifeline group) in Purbeck We provided her with a car so she could support children in Hoiniki and in nearby villages; she received training in Minsk; and was able to consult Igor regularly by phone.

In 2003 the Lifeline group donated further funds to sponsor a nurse in Zhlobin and Rogachev. We provided a car for Zhlobin and funded the ongoing expenses for both nurses, and later a nurse in Pinsk, before Pinsk Hospice was set up with support from another UK charity.

In April we brought Anna Gorchakova on a visit to Britain and she spoke at our conference, where she inspired Donegal ABC to set up a Hospice team in Mogilev.

In 2005 hospice care was reorganised in Gomel with Irish charities taking on support for care in towns and villages in the region and we set up a new team to work in the city.



Olga Semenkiako

became the doctor at the head of the Gomel Hospice Team. Olga and the nurses and psychologist received training at the Hospice in Minsk, and were always keen to learn new skills when we brought doctors or psychologists from the UK to Gomel. They worked closely with the Mayflower Centre, providing care at

home for children who were too poorly to go to Mayflower.

They looked after 12 children in the first year, and then with the help of a grant from Greenpeace Environmental trust, we were able to expand and support more families and all the team came to the UK on educational visits.





In 2010 Iryna Kalmanovich became the doctor in charge of the Hospice Team. She went for training in the Hospice in Minsk and worked closely with Anna Gorchakova and others at the Belarusian Children's Hospice. Two nurses and a psychologist worked with her in Gomel.

In 2011 we received a grant from the Raisa Gorbachev Foundation to support our work with hospice care in Belarus. In March we brought Iryna, plus a doctor from Minsk and Elena ????, the Director of the Baby Home in Gomel on a visit to the UK. They visited many Children's Hospices and cancer care centres.



With the grant we were able to fund Natalia Savva, the Medical Director of the Belarusian Children's Hospice, to study at Cardiff University for a Postgraduate Diploma in Palliative

Medicine. In autumn 2011 we brought Natalia to visit hospices in the North West of the UK and she began the course in Cardiff. Natalia had already been asked by the Ministry of Health to develop a programme to spread paediatric palliative care throughout Belarus.



In February 2012 Natalia led a round table discussion in Gomel with our Gomel hospice team and chief doctors of most of the hospitals and polyclinics in the city. She was in the process of writing a new law on palliative care which she explained to the doctors, and encouraged them to get some training for their staff.

In March 2012 Iryna Kalmanovich visited the UK to spend a week shadowing Dr. Mike Miller, a very experienced Palliative Care Consultant at Martin House Hospice in Yorkshire.

In May CCP's Palliative Care Adviser John Costello, delivered seminars in Minsk and Brest for around 50 hospital doctors and nurses, as part of the plan to develop palliative care nationwide for both children and adults.

In September Dr Mike Miller spent a week in Minsk training hospital doctors and hospice staff, including some from Gomel, and a physiotherapist came from the UK to work with hospice families in Gomel.

In spring 2013 we set up a respite care unit at Zhivitsa Rehabilitation Centre to offer some support to hospice families.

And in December we added a Fund Raiser to the Gomel team who was very successful over the next couple of years in getting support for equipment for families from local businesses.

The team have worked very closely since 2012 with Natalia Samoilik, the Director of 'Supporting Children Together'

In 2015 Gomel Health Department agreed to start funding two half time nurses from the

beginning of the following year, plus a young doctor. Iryna Kalmanovich was named the Chief Palliative Care Doctor for Gomel Region, and continued to work as our Hospice Doctor and to supervise the work of the new doctor, the nurses and our psychologist.



In 2018 a grant from the Belarusian Children's Hospice enabled Supporting Children Together to provide training to doctors in Gomel and extra support for the hospice families.

At the end of 2019 Ludmilla ?? became the Health Department's Palliative Care doctor. We are now wor4king closely with Ludmilla, the nurses and Aliona, the psychologist to provide care in Gomel

and the wider region, and we provide transport when needed to visit families.