

NAME: Dr Jessica Chua

HOME: Ulladulla, NSW



Field role: Project medical referent

Our medical doctors can be responsible for a wide range of activities, including supporting and training host country medical staff, establishing and managing mobile clinics, and providing all levels of medical care. Always working closely with local health authorities and community organisations, they require strong cross-cultural communication and resource management skills.

Médecins Sans Frontières Experience:

- 2016: Yemen and Iraq
- 2017: Iraq/West Mosul, Afghanistan/Khost and Syria/Hassakeh
- 2018: Gaza, Palestine and Syria/Hassakeh
- 2022: (Mar to Jun) Ukraine



One of the many Ukrainians displaced by the war, introduces her much loved pet, dressed in the traditional Ukrainian dress, the Vyshyvanka, to MSF doctor, Jessica Chua during her recent assignment in Ukraine. Pets are considered part of the displaced population and with their owners are welcomed in shelters.

“The resilience of the Ukrainians left a deep impression on me.”

Tell us about your assignment in Ukraine.

Initially I was based on the Polish/Ukrainian border where we were setting up medical support for displaced Ukrainians. Then I relocated to Lviv in the west where I ran mass casualty trainings for medical staff, to prepare them for triaging war wounded. Ultimately, I ended up in a city to the south-west of Kyiv, Vinnytsia, where there were already 80-90,000 displaced people fleeing from the east and south of the country. I was tasked with setting up a program to address their needs.

Could you share an example of the impact of the project?

We established a mobile clinic program for displaced people living around the city in quite precarious

conditions and sought to provide medical and psychological care for as many of them as we could reach, especially those living on the outskirts of the city and outlying regional areas who faced great challenges accessing support services. We provided medical consultations, supply of medications, individual and group counseling sessions and health education for ongoing management of chronic diseases.

What were some the challenges you faced establishing this project?

Because people had left with only what they could carry when they fled their homes, many lacked access to critical drugs for chronic conditions such as diabetes. They had little money to buy these medications so many of

them needed a lot of very practical support. Displaced families were often spread out in villages in the outskirts of Vinnytsia, and one challenge was bringing our program to them given the shortage of fuel in the country.

What stood out for you most about this mission?

The psychological impact of the war was very apparent, particularly the children whom I noticed would dive under a table at any loud sound. Many people I met in our visits to the refugees told us of their traumatic experiences. The anguish they expressed for their loved ones who are missing or unable to escape to safety, was particularly poignant. The resilience and strength of the Ukrainians I was fortunate enough to work with, who were often displaced people themselves, as well as the people I met as patients, left a deep impression on me. In Vinnytsia, the community rallied to take the displaced into their homes, people donated various essential items like clothes and blankets. Host families donated food from their own winter supplies to feed displaced families. I saw and experienced first-hand the generosity and spirit of unity in the communities we visited.

What do you do when not on assignment with MSF?

I practice as a rural generalist in Ulladulla, on the NSW south coast. Rural generalists are doctors who do another four years training so we can run primary health care all the way through to emergency care. We also have training in additional skills, I choose to specialise in GP anaesthetics, so my training and experience have always been put to good use in the field. When I am not at work, I am in the good company of my three dogs, taking advantage of the beautiful beaches and bush walks along the south coast.