

## Building a firm professional footing in Ukraine



**Physical therapists in Ukraine welcomed a visit by representatives from WCPT and the Royal Dutch Physiotherapy Association (KNGF) in May as they build a professional body and a strong footing for the profession in their country.**

The Ukrainian Association of Specialists of Physical Rehabilitation is seeking admission to WCPT as a member in 2011, and Brenda Myers, WCPT Secretary General, along with Emma Stokes, WCPT Executive Committee member, were invited to attend to provide information about the requirements of member organisations, and advice on how their push for professional status compared with the profession in other countries. Their visit coincided with the association's annual general meeting.

Philip van der Wees and Henri Kiers from the KNGF also attended. The Ukrainian Association has a twinning arrangement with the KNGF, which wants to support it in developing a strong professional base in Ukraine. In a series of meetings and workshops over four days in Lviv, the representatives of WCPT, the Ukrainian and Dutch associations explored not only the practicalities of setting up a professional association, but also looked at some of the issues of status the profession faces globally, how those compare with the situation in Ukraine, and how to build a strong foundation for the future.

Oksana Kunanec-Swarnyk of the Ukrainian Association of Rehabilitation Specialists said there were three major issues facing them in establishing the profession in Ukraine. "We need to strengthen the capacity of our association in the way it is organised and the number of members it has. We need to establish standards of practice for our profession by establishing eligibility criteria for membership of our association. And we need recognition of the profession by having recognised job places in the

Ministries of Health, Education and Social Services, and in private practice.”

She says the highlight of the business part of their AGM was approving a professional code of ethics for the association. “The presence and participation of Brenda and Emma gave us important information concerning membership in WCPT and a real desire for our successful acceptance to WCPT. Philip and Henri’s participation gave us the understanding that we are not alone and have true partners in our aspirations.”

“Our guests gave our members the incentive to aspire to professional excellence and made us feel a part of a greater mainstream physical therapy family.”

One particular problem faced by physical therapists in Ukraine, particularly in light of their desire to be part of the profession’s global community, surrounds professional title. When the profession effectively came into being in Ukraine, in 1997, practitioners were known as “physical rehabilitation specialists”. The name “physiotherapist” or “physical therapist” was not used because there was already a profession called “physiotherapy doctor”, focused mainly on the use of electrotherapy.

Emma Stokes, who comes from Ireland where there have also been problems surrounding another profession calling themselves “physical therapists”, could provide the Ukrainians with some reassurance that they were not alone.

“I provided them with a historical perspective, showing how the profession has evolved in other countries and has faced similar issues,” says Emma Stokes, who is a Senior Lecturer at Trinity College, Dublin. “Professional bodies often evolve organically, by amalgamating different groups of people.”

“The association is very interested in how they can improve the quality of physical therapy education in their country, and how they can benchmark it. And if they identify competencies for new graduates, that may help them define the differences between them and the other professional groups.”

Pictured during the AGM, from left to right: Stepan Kobelev, President Ukrainian Association of Rehabilitation Specialists; Olexandr Shupikov, Plastic Surgeon from Donetsk; Lesya Kalandyia, Secretary Ukrainian Association of Rehabilitation Specialists; Jaroslav Hrybalskij, President of the Lviv Regional Foundation for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities and Member of Regional Government

# WCPT NEWS

July 2009

