

Ukrainian students receive tour of Westmoreland Hospital in Greensburg

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From her office in Kiev, Hanna Herhel could see smoke and hear gunshots as a political protest turned deadly.

On Thursday, four months after the clash that left dozens of protesters dead, Herhel toured Excelsa Health Westmoreland Hospital in Greensburg with about 50 of her fellow Ukrainian students, learning about American business practices that could be applied in her troubled home country.

The students, all of whom are studying business at the University of Kiev, said they are worried about their nation but hopeful that it is finally on the right track.

Ukraine has been a political hotbed for months, with pro-Russian separatists in the east fighting to leave the nation and pro-Europe protesters demanding a better quality of life from former President Viktor Yanukovich, who was ousted earlier this year.

Despite the revolution, despite the violence, life has gone on largely unchanged for many Ukrainians.

“All this situation is divided geographically. The whole country lives mostly the way it was before. All the people should eat, sleep and go to work,” said Herhel, who works in a bank and is studying for her MBA at the University of Kiev.

“But we are worried about the situation,” she said. “And it was really great, at that one moment, a lot of people came to the square to show their opinion and interest. They were fighting for their freedom.”

Many died in a clash between citizens and police, but the anti-government protesters eventually prevailed.

“They didn't want their children to live in such a country, even if that would cost their lives,” Herhel said.

MBA students from the University of Kiev have been visiting the United States every year since 1996, part of a partnership with Carnegie Mellon University that was born not long after Ukraine became independent from the Soviet Union.

“We need international experience. Our groups go to the U.S.A., they go to Hong Kong, they go to some other places to learn from the experience of successful companies,” said Valentyna Demyanenko, director of the Center of Innovative Teaching Technologies at the University of Kiev.

The students asked many questions as they toured the Greensburg hospital, sometimes in English, sometimes through an interpreter. They wanted to know how the hospital measured success, how it marketed itself and how it recruited talented doctors.

Sometimes a few would stop in the hallway, smiling and holding up their phones to take “selfies,” digital self-portraits.

Health care is very different in Ukraine, according to the students. Many of the costs are covered by the government, but the quality of care is lower, they said.

“The level of service is very different (in Ukraine). It's an old hospital, old equipment. We wish it to be better in the future,” said Andrei Poduraev, who works for an insurance company while studying for his MBA.

Demyanenko said she knows the problems in the country will take years, not months to solve. She hopes her students will be part of the solution.

“All these people may have different opinions,” she said. “But these people are able to make changes in Ukraine. Because all of these are educated people, they are educated in business, they think progressively.”

The students sounded optimistic. They spoke highly of newly elected president Petro Poroshenko, who took office last week.

“We look at the future with hope, because we have a new president,” Poduraev said. “Soon we will have a new parliament. We will fight against corruption,” he said.