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FEATURED

On her way: Local medical professional heading to help Ukrainian refugees in Poland

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Jeannie Mueller with her dogs. Mueller, the chief medical officer for River Valley Family Health Center, is heading to Poland at the end of December to work with International Medical Relief in serving Ukrainian refugees. (Courtesy photo/Jeannie Mueller)

Jeannie Mueller will be expressing her gratitude this holiday season by giving — giving of her money, her time and her skills to help Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

Mueller, a physician assistant and chief medical officer at River Valley Family Health Center, departs for eastern Poland on Dec. 29 and will begin providing care through Denver-based International Medical Relief's mission start Jan. 1, 2023. Her mission lasts for two weeks at [Privacy - Terms](#)

Mueller is self-funded for the roughly \$7,000 cost.

The plight of Ukrainians, who did not ask for Russia to invade their country, moved Mueller, whose husband is of eastern European origin.



“When the war broke out, I really started looking at different places and how (to help),” Mueller said.

She found International Medical Relief and was struck by its mission and vision for setting up long-term clinics and providing education. IMR, founded in 2002, recruits medical, dental and surgical teams, as well as other health care professionals and non-medical volunteers to establish clinics. IMR supplies the medicine and medical equipment, along with logistical work; volunteers like Mueller provide the skills.

“The fundamental is the belief that basic knowledge of health facts and access to health care helps people. The big, big mission and vision is to set up long-term clinics, providing that education,” Mueller said.

The nonprofit also started emergency disaster relief responses, having an ongoing pool of providers since Russia invaded Ukraine.

“They desperately need providers. Typically, it’s only a weeklong mission, but I’m going for two weeks,” Mueller said.

She will be providing acute and emergency services to include treating wounds, chronic diseases, even muscle strain.

Refugees face many challenges, some of which are surprising until a bit of consideration is given to it: for example, the Ukrainians Mueller will be helping have been sleeping on cots for months and could benefit being taught simple ways to alleviate back pain.

Mueller will be bringing her experience at River Valley to bear in additional ways. As a federally qualified health center, River Valley does not turn away patients based on insurance status and has a sliding-scale fee for services. It serves many people from among marginalized or at-risk groups, such as migrants. Mueller expects the experience in relating to her patients here to translate well when she meets with Ukrainians needing care.

As a bonus, IMR is getting a registered yoga instructor in Mueller. She hopes to teach some techniques that can help people even after she has gone home.

Mostly, though, she'll be providing acute care and education about managing chronic diseases.

“The most human thing you can do in the world is help a stranger. Ukraine was invaded through no fault of its own. So many people have lost so much,” Mueller said.

The most current estimate she's heard put the number of refugees in Poland at 1.5 million, as of Nov. 8.

“I can't imagine not having a home to go to. Millions of refugees simply do not have the luxury of going home at night. We are so privileged over here. These people left Ukraine looking for safety and assistance. It's one small thing for me to go over and provide medical assistance and sit and talk with people,” Mueller said.

Mueller is using her paid time off with River Valley to go to Poland. She thanked River Valley CEO Kaye Hotsenpiller for supporting her upcoming work.

“I'm blessed,” Mueller said, of that support. She also expects to continue helping other countries going forward.

“I truly went into medicine to help people. In physician assistant school, I did medical trips to Mexico and kind of got the bug to continue doing that. As I look into my future, and perhaps after I retire, I know I'll be working in a different country.”

Others can help Mueller help out in Ukraine by donating to her GoFundMe account, gofund.me/e1ec719f.

Mueller said she is haunted by the war that is causing so much suffering in Ukraine.

“I feel for them. There’s that human element that helps us relate to each other,” she said. What’s happened in Ukraine should upset everyone, she added.

“It’s not something that we face every day, but it’s a very real thing, war is. They had no choice. They just woke up one day and had to get out of their country. To me, that’s just devastating,” said Mueller.

“I just want to be able to possibly put a smile on their face or help however I can. Whatever I can do. I’m just very grateful for what we have in this country. I’m honored to go and help, and maybe this will inspire somebody else to do the same thing.”

River Valley is a federally qualified health center with locations in Olathe, Montrose and Delta; info at 970-497-3333, or rivervalleyfhc.com.

International Medical Relief is a nonprofit providing to care to under-served people worldwide. It recruits qualified professionals like Mueller for short-term assignments to conduct medical clinics in environments in which care is either limited, or hard to find. You can learn more at internatoinalmedicalrelief.org.

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