



NEWS / PROFESSION

The Chiropractic-Russian Connection 2000: Return to Vladivostok

We made our first trip to treat patients in Russia in 1998 (see DC May 15, 2000, or <http://www.chiroweb.com/archives/18/11/23.html>). Since then, two Russian doctors have been to the United States and worked with us. In the summer of 2000, Dr. Stephen Saunders of Seattle and myself decided it was time to go back.

Sunday, September 17, 2000

Dr. Katya of the Spine Clinic and her translator, along with our driver (both named Lena) meet us at the airport. Our ride to the Vladivostok Hotel is delayed by a huge traffic jam. The Chinese prime minister is in town, and for his return to the airport, they closed the main highway.

Life is fun, but unpredictable in Russia. Stephen and I have adopted a saying: "If we knew what were we doing, we wouldn't be here."

Vladivostok, home of the Spine Clinic, is a strategic port city on Russia's southeast coast, situated in the northern shores of the Sea of Japan. It has international trade potential, but was closed to foreigners until 1991, as it was the Russian Navy port. Previously, the grandmother of one of the Russian patients had sent me a panoramic view of the Golden Bay of Vladivostok. I framed it and put it in my reception room

More staff and patients seen at the Spine Clinic in Vladivostok with Dr. Stephen Saunders.

By U.S. standards, Vladivostok is run-down. In 1998, the city had two stoplights for 900,000 people; now it has six. Our driver, Lena, 20, enjoys loud rock music as she navigates through traffic. Driving in Vladivostok is an experience. There are no apparent rules. I call it "nudge" driving. When Lena wants to change lanes, she "nudges" into the next lane, which "nudges" that car into the far lane. As to who yields, it comes down to who wants the position the most. I inquire about those caught drinking and driving. I'm told it is taken care of by a proper "show of respect," or bribe, to the correct person on the political ladder.



Vladivostok, the Russian Navy port, and home to the Spine Clinic.

Tuesday, September 19, 2000

We finally arrived at the hotel. It has seen better days. While it lacks hot water tonight, it serves as a place to sleep. We celebrate my birthday at a small Russian restaurant. It was my goal to skip my 50th birthday. (If you miss it, you don't get older!) The meal consists of calamari, a Russian meat soup called *spelenky*, and a type of Russian dumpling called *pelmeni*. The borsch soup is also excellent. Dr. Katya promises to give us her personal recipe. There appears to be a lack of roughage in the Russian diet.

Wednesday, September 20, 2000

We begin our work at the Spine Clinic. After waiting 25 minutes for the elevator, we carry a heavy suitcase of equipment down the stairs. We are greeted by Drs. Yuri and Evon, who were at the clinic the last time we were here. Dr. Alexsy, a new doctor, is here, and he is very excited about spinal biomechanics. Dr. Alexsy admits, "I only do Pettibon spinal biomechanics!"

The work at the Spine Clinic begins immediately upon our arrival, taking x-rays and seeing patients. One 13-year-old girl has cerebral palsy; another has scoliosis. I construct a special scoliosis brace out of a PVC pipe that I brought, and we bring small toys as gifts for the children. They say "*spaseeba*," meaning "thank you," and we say, "*pahzhalsta*." It means more than "you're welcome." It means "it is no big deal - you would do the same for me if you could." It is used as "you're welcome" and "please."

During our stay, Dr. Katya met with the Primorsky Licensing Board. The Spine Clinic's license is renewed for three more years. They say that the Spine Clinic was the best in Vladivostok, and later, we will toast to its success.

Dr. Katya's husband, Victor, is currently unemployed. He worked for the Russian military with the border patrol. Recently, the Russian Government decided to downsize its military troops by

300,000 to help control expenses. He was one of the casualties of the downsizing. Fortunately, his expertise in economics will help him land a better job.

As we analyze x-rays on the view box, the electricity shuts off. This is very common in Vladivostok, and is accepted as a cloud passing over the sun. There is also a rumor of a typhoon heading for Vladivostok for this weekend. We shall see.

We had lunch at Vostok 1, which is the major business sponsoring the Spine Clinic. The businessman who owns Vostok 1 had a life-changing adjustment by Dr. Harold McCoy in Seattle. It was his goal to establish a chiropractic clinic in Vladivostok to help his employees and the people of that city.

The x-ray equipment in the clinic is not as precise as what we are used to. We try to figure out how to improve it, but it doesn't seem possible without a major overhaul. We will check into getting them in-line x-ray equipment. They also need a "linked" exercise machine for spinal rehabilitation.

Tonight we hold classes for the doctors until 10:00 p.m., and then return to the hotel exhausted, but satisfied with our first day. There is a television in our room, which broadcasts mostly Russian, with one channel that has a Chinese movie playing with Korean subtitles. There really isn't any news about the U.S. or outside world. I wonder what is happening at home.

Thursday, September 21, 2000

The next day, I find it is possible to call the U.S. via the internet for seven rubles per minute. The exchange rate is 28 rubles to one dollar, so a five-minute call home costs just 35 rubles, or \$1.25. The internet has affected communication worldwide. In 1998, a phone call to the U.S. was 392 rubles per minute, or \$14.

We spend more time with patients during the day, and hold classes with the doctors at night. Today, Anton and his *babushka*, or grandmother visit. I saw them last time I was here, when Anton had seizures, bad posture and slow mental development. He nearly drowned as a child, and was pronounced dead for 20 minutes. He has shown progress in the last two years. His *babushka* reads a long letter to me, translated by Lena. In it, she says that this is the coldest and wettest summer that she has seen in Vladivostok in 50 years. She taught at the university, but the government terminated her job. Now, she is a kindergarten teacher and making 10 dollars a month. She explains how difficult it is to get by. She wants to know how much it would cost to send Anton to the United States for chiropractic care. She knows as a parent, we all want to best for our children. In Russia, it is not always possible. She explains that the bay is polluted, but there are many nice places to camp at some of the beaches near the city. I think she wants me to bring my family here for a vacation and stay for awhile to take care of Anton. She would make a great travel agent for Vladivostok. Somehow, I don't see this as a vacation spot.

Friday, September 22, 2000

We prepare for another day at the clinic. Lena will not be there in the afternoon, as her mother died 40 days ago. It is a Russian tradition to honor the dead on the 9th and 40th day after the death.

Friday is otherwise a good day at the clinic. It is wonderful to see the patients and the changes from the previous day. One Russian truck driver had headaches for 10 years, and wasn't able to soundly sleep for two months. After his adjustment yesterday, his headaches were gone and he slept the entire night. Our patient with cerebral palsy reports that she feels a weight has been lifted off her. She is walking much better. Anton is improving, and brought us a ceramic pot filled with

honey from his grandfather; a young girl brought in a flower she had made; another nine-year-old girl brings me caviar and shows me a photo album of her family and friends; one patient gives us a large bowl of grapes from her father's farm. We are treated with great respect. It is so nice to work with patients that appreciate chiropractic.

Matramena is the lady who cleans the clinic twice a day. She asked me to check her spine and adjust her for low back pain and headaches. I believe this is an honor. She is scheduled for another appointment for Monday.

We have lunch at Vostok 1. This business provides meals for all of its employees and for over 300 children in Vladivostok. There is a parrot in the lunchroom that was there at our previous visit. I give the parrot a toy and it plays with it immediately. We also find out that Vostok wants to start a second chiropractic clinic next to its headquarters. There is also talk of starting a chiropractic college in the city.

This evening's class focuses on spinal biomechanical adjusting. The doctors here are extremely intelligent, and understand what we are trying to do with adjusting and spinal rehabilitation. That evening we have a meeting with Dr. Katya, the clinic director, to discuss the future of chiropractic in Russia.

Our plans for a boat trip are changed by the bad weather. I still don't know where the typhoon is. Our other translator, Anton, says no one knows about the weather in Vladivostok. There is no "weather channel." Unlike us, they believe that no one can predict the weather. During the winter here the winds are very strong, and the temperature is 30 below Celsius. Many of the Russian men go ice fishing in the Amursky Bay. They drink and some fall into the water, drown or pass out and freeze to death.

On Saturday, we are told that the weather may be bad, so instead of going on a boat ride we go to the forest for a picnic. We find a place by the bay and we drink and eat and talk. The doctors from the clinic bring their families. It is a good time to create long-time friends. It is wonderful to see the clinic members outside of the "work" environment. Dr. Yuri is known for his phrase, "eat, drink, continue." We go for a swim in Amorsky Bay. Stephen and I perform a song-and-dance routine that I made up, "*Americansky, Americansky, Dobrey Utra Cok, Dela.*" It strangely translates into "Americans, Americans, Good Morning, How Are You?"



The Americans with the Spine clinic staff and its members' families at a picnic

Sunday, September 24, 2000

We return to the clinic for a full day of seminars with the doctors. The day is sunny and there is no typhoon. The exchange of information is very good. As we prepare to leave that evening, we find someone has entered the clinic and stolen Dr. Katya's purse. The police are called and our dinner plans are cancelled. (The police found the purse the next day, but the money and important documents were in her purse gone.) It is common in Russia for a thief to call the victim and offer to return the documents for a price. It can take many months to replace passports, a driver's license and other documents in Russia.

Monday, September 25, 2000

We are at the University of Vladivostok to talk to Lena's English class about health care in the United States. It is an interesting class. One student has questions about genetic altering and euthanasia. She is in support of controlling nature and life. Upon questioning, we find that about 50 percent of the students, including her, do not believe in God.

Upon our arrival at the clinic, we learn that our translator, Anton, was assaulted last night. He went to a store near his apartment, and when he left, some drunken men tried to take his money. He has a black eye and a swollen face with bruises. This is common in Russia and we vow to watch ourselves more closely.

We see many patients that today - and the improvements are remarkable! Katia is a 12-year-old girl with cerebral palsy. Her mother is very impressed with her progress. The next day, we work with her to do spinal exercises. At the end of our visit, she begins to cry. When asked what is wrong, her mother replies that she doesn't want me to leave. I turn away so she can't see me cry. It is a good day with patients.

After the clinic closes, we are served Russian tea and cakes as a "thank you" to Dr. Saunders and myself for coming. We are given gifts of chocolate and caviar, and they also give each of us a four-foot long bottle of vodka in the shape of a Russian rifle. We have our doubts about bringing these through airport customs, but we will see.

We continue classes and later that evening, Dr. Katya and Lena take us to Golden Park, a restaurant, disco and casino. When we enter, we are searched and have to go through a metal detector. We are informed that someone was recently shot there. The food is great and we head back to the hotel to pack.

We will spend Tuesday morning in the clinic before leaving at noon for our flight home. There are many goodbyes from patients, staff and doctors. We promise to return.

Building a Legacy

Our trip home includes a night in Seoul, Korea. The difference between Vladivostok and Seoul is amazing: Seoul is an international city of 12 million people. South Korea is very hilly; as we fly over it, it looks like islands of skyscraper suburbs everywhere. For dinner we find a Korean restaurant. Not understanding the Korean menu, we guess and point. The meal is prepared on a *Hibachi* grill in the table and is fantastic!

The trips through the various customs are long, but unremarkable. We appear to be adapting to world travel. Now, if we just knew what time it was.

We consider the trip a success. It feels good to be able to help people so far away. We know that this relationship will continue forever.

Dr. B.J. Palmer said, "We may never know how far-reaching what we say and do today will be tomorrow." Based upon our mutual experiences in Russia, Dr. Stephen Saunders has decided to move to St. Cloud so we may work together and establish the Chiropractic Learning Educational and Research Institute.

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