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ASIA EDITION

How Healthcare Is Impacted by the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

March 22, 2022 | News | By Devin Partida is a medical and health tech writer for HealthIT Answers, Electronic Healthcare Reporter, and other industry publications. She also writes about medical technologies, AI and cybersecurity on ReHack.com.

According to CNBC, 549 Ukrainian civilians have died so far in the Russian invasion. With Ukrainians suffering the immediate loss of life and safety, the medical industry has concerns about the turmoil and its effects on healthcare deliveries in the global economy.



Wars are complex and lead to the breakdown of society, infrastructure damage, and economic impacts. Although it's too early to tell what consequences will occur in the wake of disruption, healthcare systems will likely take a huge hit.

From medical supply chain interruptions to understaffed hospitals, here's how the conflict between Russia and Ukraine will impact healthcare.

The Suffering of Healthcare Systems in Ukraine

Healthcare systems will be impacted due to the infrastructural breakdown of hospitals and clinics – triggering hospital staff to flee and leaving hospitals to cope with growing patient care. Furthermore, hospitals may have stocks of drugs and other consumables, but not beyond a few days of inventory. This is mainly due to storage-space limitations and the costs of preserving large stockpiles.

Unfortunately, war can cause rapid consumption of particular supplies needed to treat injuries such as wound dressings, needles, and antibiotics. This is also the case for Chernihiv children's hospital, where patients battle cancer but are surrounded by Russian forces – and it's running out of food and painkillers.

Beyond hospitals, the disruption of primary care, screening, and immunization has occurred. Meanwhile, the risk of spreading infectious diseases increases if the clean water supply and sanitation systems are compromised.

IT Systems Are Vulnerable

Ukraine will have difficulty delivering healthcare services, especially since cyberattacks have affected IT systems. Such attacks include distributed denial-of-service (DDoS), malware, ransomware, and website defacements.

Some experts are warning there could be disruptive cyberattacks on those in the health and public sectors of the U.S. and other countries. For the healthcare industry, the average cost of a data breach was $9.42 million in 2021.

Every organization must prepare for disruptive cyberattacks, no matter what size. This is especially important for small entities supporting the medical supply chain infrastructure since small organizations are particularly vulnerable to attack. These would include third-party logistics, freight deliverers, and port authorities. Consequently, these attacks could affect healthcare systems and suppliers.

Essentially, the countries of a post-Cold War era are slowly accepting that this invasion could introduce a domino effect – and there are risks when it comes to relying on the global economy.

However, as more countries believe in the possibilities, things will change. Companies could start carrying out relocations, moving their supply chains closer to Russia.

Delayed Production and Transportation of Supplies

If imports come from Asia to Europe, airfreight can no longer fly over Russia. Airfreight and ocean deliveries have to revise their routes or rely on slower, more costly modes of transportation. As air cargo prices have already heightened, rerouting costs will rise even higher.

Ports are seeing a large amount of congestion, meaning medical supplies are trapped and there's an increase in container backlogs.

As there is an anticipation of delays, worldwide factories have halted or delayed production. These conflicts may not bring immediate difficulties to the U.S. healthcare system. However, long-term disruptions are possible. With the U.S. dependent on medical supply imports, the conflicts reveal long-term structural issues.

Raw Materials and Medical Supply Chain Disruptions

Much of the world's supplies of raw materials to make hospital equipment come from Russia and Ukraine's crude oil, natural gas, and certain metals. As U.S. healthcare organizations depend on common raw materials, a rise in prices for medical supplies is possible. Russia produces 12% of the world's oil and 17% of its natural gas supply. Disruptions to production are anticipated, which may directly strike the global supply chain and pricing of plastics.

Once the supply chain is interrupted from the invasion, European countries will have to scramble and find other suppliers. As a result, natural gas prices will be affected even further. Manufacturers that buy the raw materials will have the ability to raise their prices to cover the expenses. However, healthcare facilities will have to take the impact, along with their customers.

Handling the Long-term Effects

These conflicts are disrupting healthcare supply chains and causing medical supply price spikes, and health systems will have to bear the cost. The industry’s only solution is to rethink how to mitigate these risks in the future through automation, reshoring, and other supply chain-bolstering techniques.