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Ukraine invasion: Russian doctors urge Putin to cease hostilities

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Thousands of Russian doctors and other healthcare workers have signed an open letter to Vladimir Putin urging him to cease hostilities against Ukraine.

In their letter doctors, nurses, and paramedics said that they “strongly oppose the military actions carried out by Russian armed forces on the territory of Ukraine” and called for their president to withdraw troops.^{1 2}

As at Monday 28 February a total of 15 000 medical professionals across Russia had signed the letter.

“Our mission is to save human lives,” the letter said. “At this difficult time for both countries, we call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and for the resolution of all political issues exclusively by peaceful means.”

The letter emphasised that doctors’ relatives, friends, patients, and colleagues were located in the areas under attack. “There is not a single person among them who would benefit from the ongoing bloodshed,” they wrote.

“Human life is priceless. It takes a moment to be killed in action, while the treatment and recovery of the victims can take years. And for the moments of today’s war, we will pay for many years after. Therefore, following our oaths and maintaining a humane and equal treatment of all lives, we demand an immediate suspension of all operations with the use of lethal weapons.”

Ksenia Suvorova, a doctor by training and founder of the Russian evidence based medicine news site MadMed.Media, who coordinated the letter, told *The BMJ* that many healthcare professionals who signed the letter had friends or relatives living in Ukraine who have been affected by the invasion.

“My best friend lives in Kharkiv. Luckily for her she was able to escape and flee the city on the first day, when Russian tanks were coming towards her home. She didn’t go too far, and she stayed in the suburbs. However, this area was covered by bombing soon. This is not the only story some of us have received from Ukraine from our friends and families. Obviously, hearing such terrible news was hard to bear,” she said.

Suvorova added that some doctors and medical professionals in Russia were being urged to join the military operation in Ukraine.

“Many people are seriously considering leaving,” she said. “Of course, many of us are scared.

“I certainly do not support hostility towards Ukraine and demand the discontinuation of war efforts immediately. It’s difficult for all doctors, because we feel like we were thrown back in time and are living through a civil war, where society is divided into those who support the war and those who are against it. However, most doctors are against this, as is stated in our letter, because of the nature of our profession at the very least. It is our duty to be sympathetic.”

She added, “I am glad to see the number of people from the medical community who continue to sign our letter. It means that with each signature there is one more person against the war.”

Other professional groups, including journalists, teachers, scientists, and cultural figures, have made similar pleas to Putin.

1 Russian doctors, nurses, and paramedics demand an end to hostilities in Ukraine. *BMJ* 2022;376:o535. doi: 10.1136/bmj.o535.

2 Open letter [in Russian]. MadMed.Media. <https://madmed.media/open-letter>