

Challenges of delivering medical care and support for patients with cancer in the de-occupied territories

Marina Verchykova M.D, Medical Director, Ivan Chervynskyy M.D, Clinical oncology, Aline Hrytsan M.D, oncology surgeon

Background.

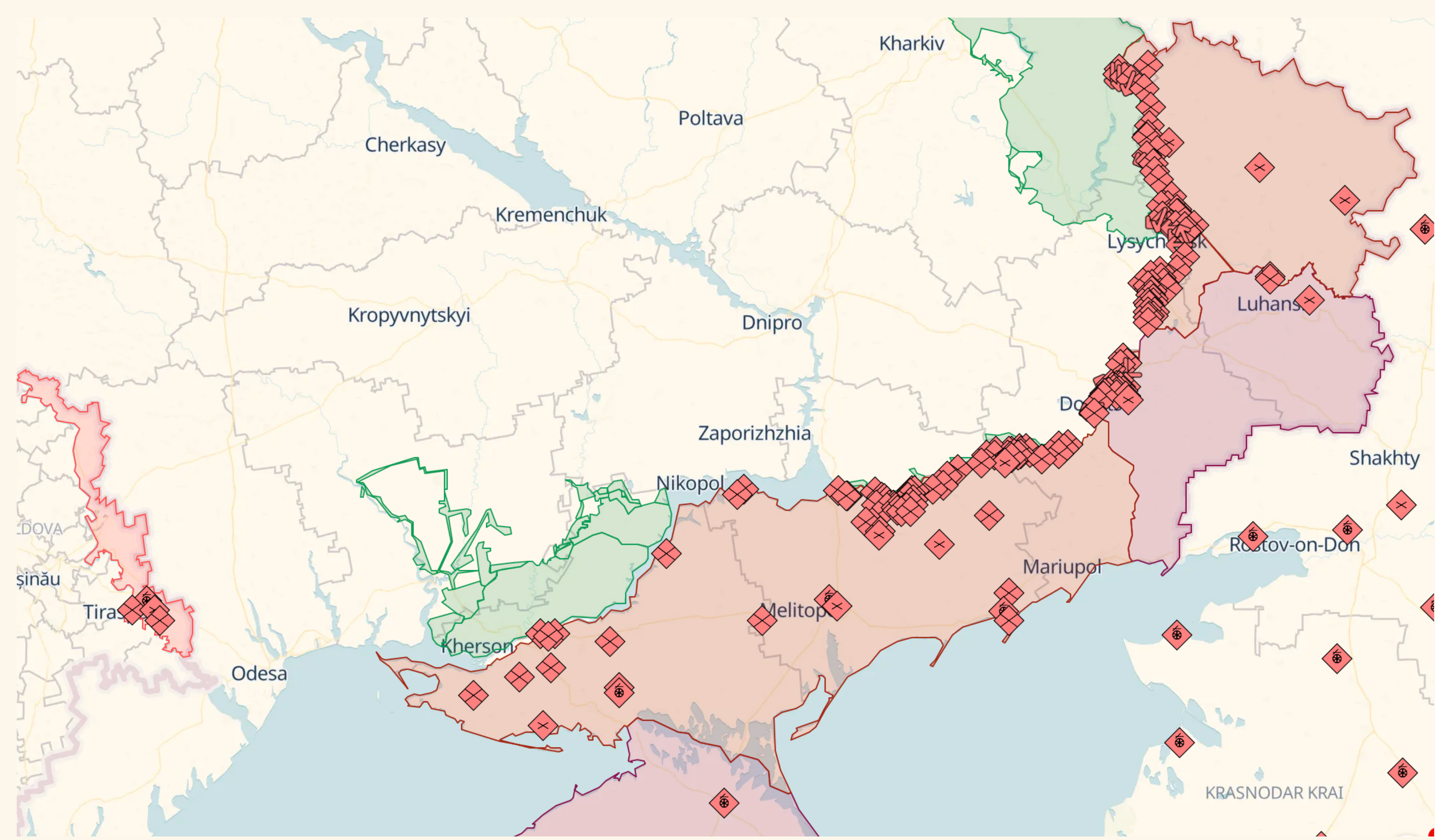
Mariupol Oncological Center provides screening for cancer, diagnosis and treatment of patients with an existing cancer disease in the city of Kyiv. Over the years, a special group of patients that requires close monitoring has been identified. Patients with an existing or undiagnosed cancer status do not have access to proper medical care and support due to significant destructive damages in the occupied or de-occupied territories and have limited access to healthcare networks.

Methods.

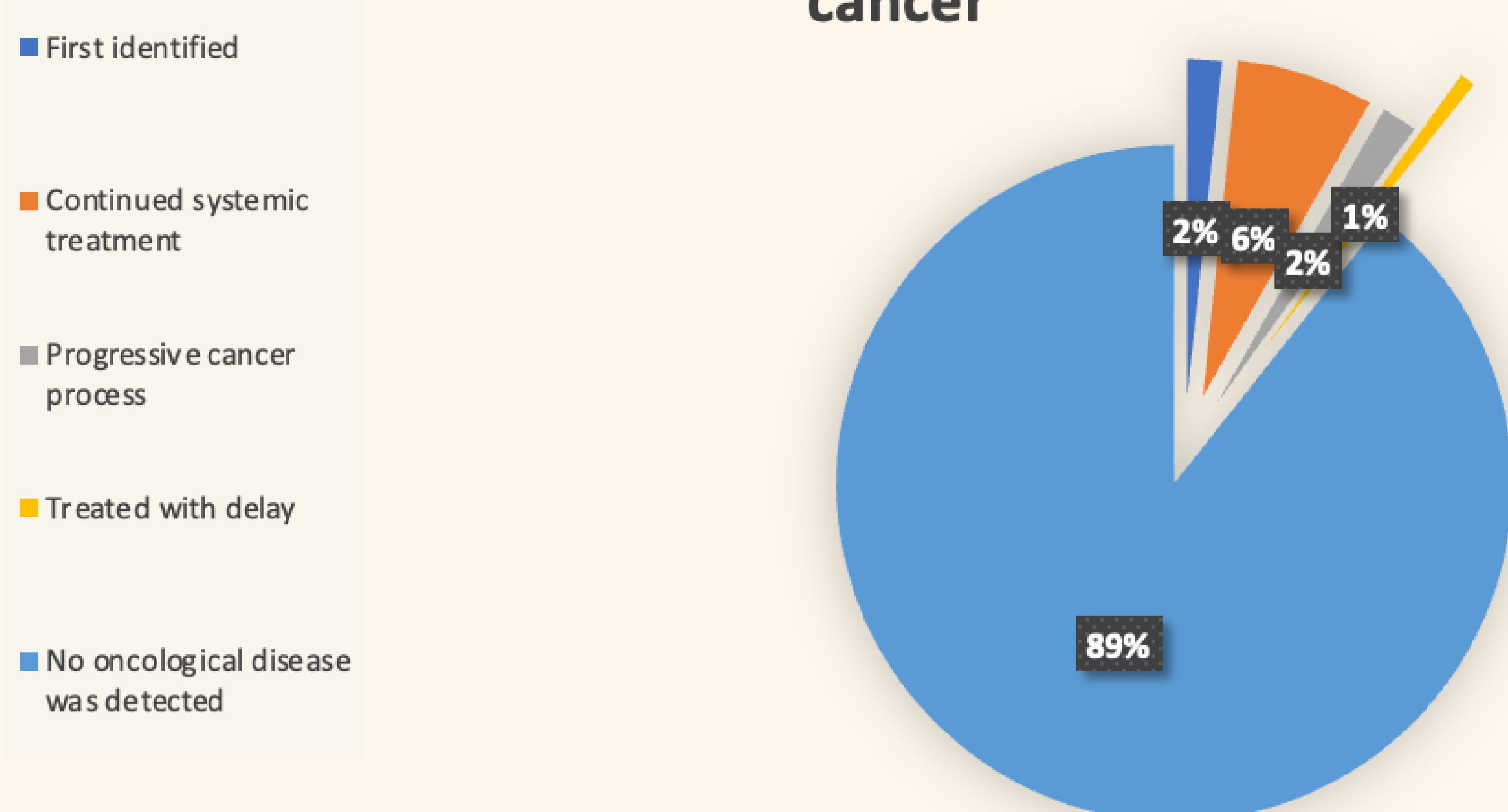
A retrospective review of Donetsk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk, and Kharkiv regions was conducted to identify a vulnerable group of patients with cancer (Map 1). Since September 2022, Mariupol Oncological Center has been providing outpatient care at Kyiv Cancer Centre, with a total of 1631 patients, all of whom were IDPs (internally displaced persons).

Results.

Among the 1631 patients at the cancer centre, 27 patients were diagnosed with newly diagnosed cancer. The number of patients who were continuing the treatment after diagnosed cancer was 107. The number of patients who had stopped treatment at the time of the examination due to a change of residence or the detection of cancer progression was 28. The number of patients who started their treatment with a delay due to inaccessibility to healthcare facilities is 12. It was found that temporarily displaced cancer patients did not receive prompt medical care due to the lack of access to medical facilities and their severe psycho-emotional state. This, as a result, led to an increase in the number of patients who continued treatment and did not achieve a state of remission.



Breakdown of temporarily displaced persons by cancer



Conclusions

People living in the occupied and de-occupied territories are potentially living in the areas where they are unable to change their place of residence. This group has limited access to healthcare facilities, which complicates their screening, diagnosis and treatment. There is also a lack of sanitary and hygienic conditions, communications, and a low level of logistical support. In its turn, this will potentially lead to a decrease in overall survival and relapse-free survival and may affect the epidemiological situation of cancer. Currently, there are no existing measures to improve the epidemiological situation and support for patients with cancer diagnosis in the de-occupied and occupied territories. Standardised screening protocols and systemic treatment are essential for all groups of patients without exception. Preoperative systemic treatment, radical surgical treatment and postoperative treatment are necessary for the patients that have stopped receiving them due to the inaccessibility of healthcare facilities. At present, the existing protocols for cancer patients on emergency response [1][2][3] cannot be implemented in Ukraine. This prompts further study of this issue and the establishment of a system for monitoring temporary displaced cancer patients in the de-occupied territories.

1. CDCBreastCancerCancerPatients:DiagnosisandTreatmentAvailable online: <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/survivors/patients/index.htm> (accessed on 14 September 2023).
2. EmergencyResourcesfortheCancerCommunity–NCIAvailableonline: <https://www.cancer.gov/contact/emergency-preparedness> (accessed on 14 September 2023).
3. Majeed, J.; Chawla, S.; Bondar, E.; Chimonas, S.; Martin, S.C.; O'Sullivan, M.; Jones, D. Rapid Response Team Activations in Oncologic Ambulatory Sites: Characteristics, Interventions, and Outcomes. *JCO Oncol. Pract.* 2022, 18, e1961–e1970. doi:10.1200/OP.22.00436.