

LIFE Medical Center - Project Summary



The end of the 80's brought sweeping change across the face of Eastern Europe, and the nation of Romania emerged out of one of the most passionate and bloodstained revolutions of the decade. Their potential future as a free nation looked bright, but communism had had a firm hold for over four decades in Romania. Considered particularly cruel and extreme even when compared to other communist dictatorships, the scars left upon Romania were imprinted in every life and in every sector of society. While communism's effects are pervasive, they are rarely found more striking and shocking than in Romania's medical system.

Romania: A Medical System and Structure Under Duress

It was clear from the beginning that positive and lasting change, particularly in the area of healthcare, would require years, even decades of hard work and patience. Indeed, it's been over 20 years since the fall of communism in Romania and this process is far from complete. Romania's medical system is plagued by the remnants of a past culture of suspicion, neglect, and abuse. Usually paid meager salaries by the state, physicians are forced by their circumstances to accept "supplementary payments" or bribes from patients

The challenges of past medical practices and philosophies are plaguing every area of Romania's healthcare system. Unfortunately, no area has been as dramatically affected as women's healthcare has – particularly surrounding the critical issues of abortion and maternity care.

Abortion: an out-of-control epidemic

Under the communist dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu, abortion was strictly forbidden in Romania. Ceausescu did not outlaw abortion because of his moral convictions or out of regard for unborn human life. His goal rather, was to inflate the population in a wild attempt to prove that his style of communism could sustain a nation, even with an exploding population. Women were rewarded for producing children, and at times punished for failing to do so. Communist officials often examined women of childbearing age who did not reproduce as expected. As many anticipated, this offensive plan backfired and created a disturbing repercussion when the veil of communism was lifted.



Only a few days after the fall of communism, the provisional Romanian government granted the right to abortions on demand. Many, both within and outside of Romania, cheered with approval. This announcement was viewed not only as a significant step towards freedom and democracy, but also as a form of restitution for the cruel policies under the Ceausescu regime. However, this decision created a

problem unique to Romania; one that caught the attention of those on both sides of the controversial abortion debate.

In 1990, immediately after the revolution, Romania became the “abortion champion” of the world, performing more abortions per capita than any other nation in the world. In that year alone, Romania tallied a mind-numbing one million abortions - more than three times the number of live births in Romania for the same period.

Currently, the abortion ratio in Romania is 5.8 abortions for every 10 babies born. The rate jumps to approximately 7 abortions per 10 live births in urban areas such as Cluj-Napoca, where LIFE Medical Center, the project under discussion in this report, is under development. In the capital, Bucuresti, some estimate the abortion rate could be as high as 18 abortions/10 live births. Additionally, studies show that the average Romanian woman will have three to four abortions during her reproductive years; and there are known incidents of women having upwards of 20.



In their most recent study on maternity care in Romania, the World Health Organization declared Romania to have a “culture of abortion”. Four inter-related and disturbing facts emerged from the WHO report:

1. Very little time was spent in medical school teaching students communication and education skills related to reproductive health. Many doctors reported feeling unprepared to help patients make decisions, especially related to pregnancy prevention. There is a clear link between this lack of education, and the reliance upon abortion as an “after thought” treatment.
2. Only a few hours out of the physicians’ entire medical training were devoted to discussing pre-pregnancy birth control methods.
3. Abortion is among the first procedures that young obstetric interns were required to perfect.
4. Obstetric graduates said they viewed abortion as a potential source for significant income.

An important side note: People often have strong opposing opinions when it comes to the legality and/or morality of abortion. However, most can agree that pursuing abortion as a primary form of birth control, and at such elevated rates, poses a serious problem. It is simply a poor approach to women’s healthcare and something we all need to be concerned about.



Maternity Care: a critical lack of quality and compassion

Alongside the abortion crisis is the alarming lack of quality obstetrical care. Services in the public sector are lacking at best. Outdated equipment, aging facilities, a lack of proper medications, insufficient training, and poor patient interaction are all working against women. As if that were not enough, misguided cultural assumptions related to medical practices, and misdirected systemic and fiscal policies all contribute to this massive problem, affecting the actual care that women receive.

Women are often left to birth alone without the help and support of an appropriate supporter. Fathers are not allowed to participate in the process, and are often kept from entering the clinic. Rooms are often crowded with multiple women laboring, delivering and recovering in the same area. Bribes are required by both nurses and doctors to

provide the proper attention to birthing moms. Often times, these bribes are expected even to obtain the most basic care (i.e. soiled bedding changed, medication administered). At a time when women need more support than any other in their lives, they are abandoned during the birthing process, if not physically, certainly emotionally and psychologically.

According to Dr. David Ille, founder of the Pro Vita Clinic Foundation and a medical expert in Romania:

“Maternity care in Romania is plagued by some very deep problems, the essence of which is a lack of respect for human beings. Four to five women are placed in the same room, with absolutely no privacy. Privacy is a completely foreign concept to them.

The newborn child is viewed as the property of the hospital and staff must be bribed for visitation or viewing rights. The ability to see the new baby is viewed as a favor, not a familial right. Pre-mature babies are often not given much attention. If the baby dies, it’s recorded as an abortion. If the baby does somehow survive, they are then recorded in the live-birth register after the fact.

During a stay in the hospital, women are in a most uncertain atmosphere. They feel the tension created by the policy makers who devalue medical services by paying the doctors very low wages. This forces doctors to find a way to survive, often by manipulating patients when they are in need of medical help. Patients never quite know whom they should bribe, how much money to give, or when the appropriate time is. But, they must consider all these things if they want proper medical care, or just the sheets changed. During childbirth, women are made to feel as if they are at the mercy of the doctor, and this hurts their dignity.

Romanians are familiar with the atmosphere of the hospitals here and women do not look forward to having babies; not because of the labor pains, but because of the attitude towards patients and the inhumane conditions that they must deliver in.”

A History of Compassionate Response

The Pro-Vita Clinic Foundation: Mission and History

In 1998, the Pro Vita Clinic Foundation was formed in an attempt to meet the social and medical challenges faced by Romanian women. Based in the northwestern Romanian city of Cluj-Napoca (located in the famed region of Transylvania, the organization has made an impact across the nation.



ProVita performs the following services in the communities they serve:

- Counseling for pregnant women who are uncertain about a current pregnancy, and for those seeking help after an abortion of a previous pregnancy.
- High school educational programs, with the purpose of preventing adolescent pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.
- Gynecology services with a patient focused perspective of human dignity.
- 2D, 3D, and 4D ultrasound services.
- Some pediatric services.

- Pregnancy preparation classes - pain management, nutrition, physical fitness guidance
- Education and awareness through media (radio, television, print) as well as through partnerships in the medical community, churches, and other like-minded organizations.

At the outset, the Foundation performed no medical care; they provided only education, and counseling services. In time, the board of directors determined that small medical clinics would be the perfect vehicles to provide a unique and much-needed service. These medical services now perfectly complement the education and counseling services (non-profit services) that the ProVita Clinic Foundation provides in the community. Another intended benefit was to create a revenue stream to help provide for these non-profit activities. This was a tremendous step towards sustainability. While all counseling and educational services are offered completely free of charge to women in crisis, the medical services (gynecology, pediatrics, and ultrasound) are a source of sustainability for the ministry and are provided at standard market rates. The fees are very reasonable given Romania's economy, and the level of care is much higher than that found in the state clinics.



Planning for the Future

Romania's women and children need an advocate; someone who will stand up and take practical steps to improve both the conditions and the philosophy with which maternity care is approached. Sadly, no one in the current system has taken that stand... until now.

A Critical Juncture: The ProVita Clinic Foundation's Future Vision

Expanding Impact to Benefit All

One of the Foundation's most significant goals is to help launch **another 25 affiliate centers in Romania by the year 2020**. These centers would be providing free counseling and educational services in the communities in which they are placed. By doing so President, Dr. Ilie, believes that they can impact 60% of the population. As the new centers become operational, they are confident that they will create a major shift in the attitudes of Romanian citizens toward abortion and maternity care. This in turn will help reduce abortion as a birth-control method, while also creating a whole new platform and standard for what baby delivery care means in Romania.

Expanding Services for Women & Children

The current ProVita clinics are not designed to allow them to deliver babies. Unfortunately, patients must be sent back to state hospitals to deliver the child in a sub-standard environment. There is a serious lack of continuity-of-care with this approach. The Foundation's goal, therefore, is to be able to care for and interact with women throughout the entire process of pregnancy, birth, and post-partum.

Expanding Resources

In order for the ProVita Clinic Foundation to achieve these ambitious goals of launching 25 new affiliate counseling/education centers, AND offering life oriented Maternity Services, they need to increase their financial resources and ensure future sustainability. This will enable the The ProVita Clinic Foundation to accomplish something that very few non-profit organizations in Romania have done: **to become independent of on-going outside financial support, and become a self-sustainable resource for Romanian women and children.** **This exciting solution is called LIFE Medical Center!**

LIFE Medical Center: A Hope-Filled Solution

The vehicle for the transformation of women's health care in Romania is LIFE Medical Center (LMC). LIFE Medical Center will be a multi-specialty clinic with the centerpiece being a Birthing Center.



A New Approach

LIFE Medical Center will be like no other clinic in Romania. ProVita's plan is to create a Maternity Center that sets a totally new standard for gynecological and obstetric care. The doctor-patient relationship will be a warm and partnership-centered association where all patients are treated with dignity. Their physicians will value human life as the greatest gift from God. LMC will be the only baby delivery center in Romania that does not provide abortion on demand.

What will make the Life Medical Center's services unique?

- It will allow women to give birth in comfortable home-like beds and in a variety of positions allowing for more natural pain-relief and maximum comfort.
- Two of the six birthing rooms will be equipped for water birthing (first in the nation).
- The birthing mother will have the same private comfortable room and bathroom through the entire process. This will ensure patient dignity and privacy, increase comfort, allow husbands and families to be more involved in the process, and decrease cross-infection rates.
- Each room will be equipped with a second bed so that the spouse or birthing coach can be present as much as they and the mother desire – before, during and after the birth.
- Women giving birth at LMC will be educated and prepared for their experience like never before in Romania. Midwives, nurses, and physicians, with support from the Educational Department, will train soon-to-be mothers and fathers about every aspect of the process so that they can make wise decisions and fully participate in their birthing experience.
- The in-house Education Department will be open to both patients and the community, providing classes on such topics as pregnancy, birthing techniques and coaching (i.e. Bradley Method and Lamaze), lactation consulting, post-partum issues, and even parenting classes.
- Fathers will be prepared, encouraged, and welcomed into the birthing rooms.
- The Center will offer C-sections and a neo-natal intensive care unit, allowing medical staff to handle the serious complications that can arise during the birthing process or afterward.



The cornerstone of Life Medical Center is the birthing center, but there will be other medical specialties as well. Together they will create balance and integration, allowing for a more productive, efficient, and financially sustainable project. Services to be offered include:

- Obstetrics (Birthing) & Gynecology
- Ultrasound
- Neonatology
- Educational Department and Birthing Preparation
- Pediatrics
- Internal Medicine
- Cesarean/Laparoscopic Surgery
- Laboratory Services
- Psychological Counseling Department
- Pharmacy Services

Distinguishing Values

Christian – LMC will be founded on Biblical ethics, principles of Christ’s compassion, as well as love and concern for the spiritual and physical needs of mankind.

Private – LMC is not a government clinic. A board of dedicated men and women will oversee the organization, and steward the resources in a most responsible and effective manner.

Self-Sustaining – LMC will charge for many of the medical services. By doing so the clinic will become independent of on-going outside support, while also funding the expansion of the ProVita Clinic Foundation’s vision to serve more women and families in need.

Gospel and Ministry Minded – Funds generated from LMC will be used to expand ProVita Clinic Foundation affiliate centers into other parts of Romania. In addition, LMC will subsidize the costs of certain medical services for those in need who cannot afford to pay the entire amount by themselves.

Fulfilling the Dream & Making an Impact for LIFE!

ProVita Clinic Foundation's Board of Directors recognizes the need for generosity from people who share their values and vision if this dream is to become a reality. They believe that the women, children, and families of Romania will be greatly helped by the services provided at Life Medical Center and the compassionate Christ-like heart, with which they are offered. As a demonstration of their dedication, each ProVita Clinic Foundation board member has already made a personal sacrificial financial commitment to the project, and they are continuing to seek funds within Romania, as HealthBridge Global, a US Project Partner is continuing to seek partners outside of Romania.

On behalf of the women and children of Romania, we invite you to participate in this unprecedented opportunity to advance a culture of life and create a long-needed medical center that will transform women’s healthcare. Help us build a bridge, and make an **IMPACT for Life!**



For more information about this project, please contact HealthBridge Global at: info@healthbridgeglobal.org