

Physician Leader and FAAFP Dr. Svetlana Kovtunova Recently Featured on Close Up Radio

BRADENTON, FL, UNITED STATES, April 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- If you're searching for proof that grit and heart can outshine adversity, look no further than Dr. Svetlana Kovtunova. Her journey reads like a cinematic narrative tracing the path of an ambitious student in the former Soviet Union, through the aftermath of Chernobyl, to the fast-paced emergency rooms of New York. Yet her story is more than a personal triumph; it is a testament to how conviction, resilience, and curiosity can transform not only a career, but the very experience of patient care.

A Life Shaped by Upheaval and Purpose



Born in Ukraine, once known as Europe's breadbasket, Dr. Kovtunova learned resilience early in life. Named after Svetlana Alliluyeva (a woman who sought freedom beyond the constraints of Soviet rule) her upbringing was grounded in strong family values, disciplined education, and a deep sense of purpose.

That purpose was tested in 1986, when the Chernobyl disaster irrevocably altered her homeland. As a young medical trainee, Dr. Kovtunova witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of a public health crisis.

"I was going door to door, administering iodine solution to help prevent radiation sickness," she recalls. "Overnight, Ukraine changed. Power shortages, environmental contamination, and widespread poverty became our reality."

In those difficult years, compensation for medical work often came not in currency, but in food (bags of potatoes, carrots, or cooking oil) bartered to sustain families. Yet even in the face of hardship, her commitment never wavered. "In the darkest moments, I knew I had to keep going," she says.

Rebuilding from the Ground Up

After years of uncertainty, Dr. Kovtunova and her family seized a rare opportunity to immigrate to the United States, arriving in Brooklyn in 1997. There, she began again from the very bottom.

Despite holding advanced medical credentials from a rigorous European education system, she faced the harsh reality that her qualifications were not recognized. With limited English and no financial resources, she started as a volunteer, later working minimum-wage jobs and serving as an emergency room technician.

"I came to the United States with no English and not a penny in my pocket," she reflects.

Undeterred, Dr. Kovtunova rebuilt her path step by step, learning a new language, retaking licensing exams, and navigating the demanding process required to practice medicine in the U.S.

A Defining Turning Point in Medicine

Her perseverance led her to a residency program affiliated with the University at Buffalo and Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, where she encountered a mentor who would profoundly



shape her approach to care: Melvin Dyster.

Under his guidance, she discovered that medicine is not solely about diagnostics or treatment protocols, it is about connection.

“Patient care isn’t about the latest drugs or technology,” she says. “It’s about listening to understand the story behind the symptoms. Dr. Dyster taught me to treat patients with heart. That’s a lesson for life.”

Bridging Compassion and Innovation: Leading the AI Transformation in Medicine

After completing her residency and training, Dr. Svetlana Kovtunova devoted more than two decades to practicing medicine with a singular goal: to spend meaningful time with her patients and care for them with empathy and presence. Over time, however, the increasing demands of electronic medical records and rigid quality metrics began to erode that connection, transforming moments of human interaction into tasks of documentation.

“For years, I felt like I was being pulled away from what matters most, the human connection,” she reflects. “Medicine became more about screens than about people.”

Today, Dr. Kovtunova stands at the forefront of a transformative shift in healthcare, defined by the thoughtful integration of AI to make medicine more precise, accessible, and, importantly, more human.

Embracing generative AI tools such as Vera Health, she is redefining what modern clinical practice can look like. Rather than replacing physicians, she views AI as a powerful ally that is capable of reducing administrative burden, streamlining workflows, and restoring the physician’s ability to be fully present with patients.

“AI isn’t magic. It’s not an enemy, and it’s not replacing doctors,” she explains. “It’s a tool (like a stethoscope or a CT scan) and its value depends entirely on how thoughtfully we use it.”

After completing advanced coursework through Harvard Medical School and collaborating with physicians worldwide, Dr. Kovtunova has witnessed firsthand how AI can transform clinical care.



From accelerating literature reviews to generating tailored treatment plans and offering real-time clinical insights, these tools can significantly reduce both cognitive and administrative strain (particularly for overextended physicians navigating an increasingly complex healthcare system).

She sees this evolution as a meaningful response to one of modern medicine's greatest challenges: the rise of defensive, documentation-heavy practices that have distanced physicians from their patients.

"AI will not define my role, I will define it," she says. "These tools will continue to evolve, but it is my values, my judgment, and how I choose to lead with them that will make the difference."

Innovation with Responsibility

Yet Dr. Kovtunova is equally clear-eyed about the risks.

"AI must be introduced responsibly with clear guidance, transparency, and ethical oversight," she emphasizes.

Echoing the perspective of Geoffrey Hinton, she underscores the importance of public understanding in shaping the future of AI in healthcare. "Our future depends on using AI for humanity," she notes. "That requires education, awareness, and intentional leadership."

In her current role, Dr. Kovtunova is focused on integrating AI responsibly into clinical practice by leveraging innovation to enhance, not replace, the human side of medicine. Her vision is clear: a healthcare system where technology works quietly in the background, allowing physicians to return to what drew them to medicine in the first place by listening, connecting, and healing.

Practical, Patient-First Innovation

At the core of her work is a commitment to practical, patient-centered progress. Her message to both colleagues and patients is simple: start small, stay curious, and engage actively with the tools shaping modern healthcare.

Whether it's using AI to better understand lab results, support lifestyle decisions, or enhance clinical communication, she consistently emphasizes that technology should serve as a supplement (not a substitute) for human judgment and compassion.

"Whether you're a physician or a patient, your greatest ally is knowledge," she says. "The more we understand our bodies, our choices, and our options, the better decisions we can make. Technology can support us, but only if we keep humanity at the center."

A Journey Full Circle

Dr. Svetlana Kovtunova is a Ukrainian-born physician whose journey (from the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster to practicing medicine in New York) exemplifies resilience, determination, and compassion. Overcoming language barriers and systemic challenges, she rebuilt her medical career in the United States and became known for a patient-centered approach grounded in empathy and human connection.

From the shadows of Chernobyl to the frontlines of American medicine, her path has been defined by reinvention and an unwavering commitment to humanity. Today, as she helps shape the integration of Artificial Intelligence into healthcare, her story comes full circle.

Yet her mission remains unchanged: to care for people, not just patients.

In an era increasingly shaped by technology, Dr. Kovtunova stands as a powerful reminder that the future of medicine will not be determined by algorithms alone, but by the courage, compassion, and values of those who choose how to use them.

Close Up Radio recently featured Dr. Svetlana Kovtunova in a two-part interview with Jim Masters on Tuesday April 7th at 10am Eastern, and with Doug Llewelyn on Tuesday April 21st at 10am Eastern

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