

Emergency Pediatric Center at Iashvili Children's Central Hospital in Tbilisi Saves Lives, Greatly Improves Pediatric Services

The name of a three-year old girl who is playing in the waiting room of the Emergency Pediatric Center (EPC) is on the list on the triage board. It is written in green, meaning that the young child's condition is stable and that she can wait until the needs of the patients whose names are written in red and blue are addressed. Although triage is a normal part of urgent care in the United States, Europe, and many other parts of the world, the technique was never used in the former Soviet Union and is still unique for many of the emergency hospitals in its former republics.



A young patient and her mother spend time playing while waiting at Iashvili Children's Central Hospital's state-of-the-art Emergency Pediatric Center in Tbilisi, Georgia.

It's not surprising that the EPC has implemented a system of evaluating patients that is unique within the region — after all, the center itself is the only facility of its kind to be found in Eastern Europe. The brand new facility on the ground floor of Iashvili Children's Central Hospital in Tbilisi is bright and cheerful and was designed in accordance with western standards. It opened its doors just one year ago, but during that time the number of patients it serves has increased three-fold and it's easy to see why.

The center provides services free of charge. It is open 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week and is equipped with hi-tech diagnostic and laboratory equipment. Financed with the contributions of 22 commercial and non-governmental organizations, the facility boasts a professional staff who were trained by specialists from the Emory University School of Medicine and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Egleston to perform all sorts of clinical procedures used to manage a variety of medical problems ranging from acute respiratory infection to abdominal pain, head trauma, febrile seizures, and infections of the nervous system. Due to this collaboration, emergency medicine is now recognized as a medical specialty for physicians in Georgia.

Through advanced practitioner training in emergency medicine—as well as the development of clinical practice guidelines—EPC has been able to decrease the average length of a hospital stay from 13 to seven days while at the same time increasing the rate of discharges from 8 to 56 percent. As a result, the Center managed to reduce its operating costs by almost \$450,000 of its projected budget within the first year of its operation. Even more impressive is the fact that although the Center treats the most difficult cases from all regions of Georgia, mortality rates have decreased.

In part, the many successes achieved by EPC can be attributed to the skills that staff gained through a number of management trainings held by the US partners. As a result, significant improvements in cost recovery, the registration system, and the organizational structure have been made. This, in turn, contributes greatly to more effective decision-making and marked improvements in priority setting and self-sufficiency. The partners have also been effective at achieving improvements in the delivery of nursing services and teamwork, thereby improving quality control procedures, infection control, and rational drug use.

Acknowledging the effectiveness of the center, Georgia's Ministry of Health and Social Support has decided to finance it from the state budget and is planning to replicate its model throughout the country. To facilitate the replication, the partners plan to establish an Emergency Pediatric Training Center, which will be staffed by certified trainers who have completed an Initial Pediatric Life Support Course provided by the specialists from Emory. The certified trainers will then disseminate their knowledge to colleagues from the country's other emergency hospitals.



EPC director Nino Kikodze shows off the state-of-the art facilities used to provide care for acute patients.