

## Walker and Sasania Receive USAID's Outstanding Citizen Achievement Citation for Work in AIHA Partnership

The new state-of-the-art pediatric emergency room at M. Iashvili Central Children's Hospital in Tbilisi is the only one of its kind in the Republic of Georgia. On April 19, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) honored Dr. Ken Walker, of Emory University School of Medicine, and Dr. Irakli Sasania, director of Iashvili, for leadership that made the emergency room a reality. Walker and Sasania are, respectively, the US and Georgian partnership coordinators to AIHA's Tbilisi/Atlanta healthcare partnership.

The April 19 ceremony, held at the Emory Conference Center, was to formally present the Outstanding Citizen Achievement Citation to Walker; Sasania will be honored with the same award in a ceremony to take place in Tbilisi on June 14. But as in any true partnership, the accomplishments of one man could not be easily separated from those of the other. Despite the dual ceremonies, the honor was meant to be shared equally by both men, said Brock Bierman, chief of staff of USAID's Europe and Eurasia Bureau. "The partnership can't work unless you have two people who work cohesively together."



Drew W. Luten III, of USAID, presents Dr. Ken Walker with the Outstanding Citizen Achievement Citation.

This is the first time that the Outstanding Citizen Achievement Citation has been given jointly to two people and the first time it has been given to someone who is not a US citizen. USAID's decision to honor the leadership of both sides of the Tbilisi/Atlanta partnership underscores the unusual collaborative approach taken to international development by AIHA's healthcare partnerships.

"In celebrating the Georgia/Georgia partnership's achievements and Ken and Irakli's particular contributions to those achievements this evening, we honor the effort of [AIHA's] many thousands of volunteers and the transformational power of the partnerships that they have participated in," said AIHA Executive Director James P. Smith, speaking at the ceremony.

The Tbilisi/Atlanta partnership opened a pediatric emergency room at M. Iashvili Central Children's Hospital in May 2004. It is the first of its kind not just in Georgia, but in the region.

"This extraordinary collaboration has markedly improved health outcomes for Georgian children who require emergency care," said Drew W. Luten III, USAID acting assistant administrator for Europe and Eurasia, who presented the citation. "Partnerships such as these are fundamental to lasting, sustainable progress across the globe."

Smith also lauded the emergency room and expressed hope that it would serve as a model for others in the region. But he cautioned against oversimplifying the achievements of Walker,

Sasania, and the partnership as a whole. “While this pediatric emergency room perfectly captures and displays what volunteers and partnerships can accomplish, it is just one very small piece in a very large body of work that Ken and Irakli have catalyzed and guided over the years.”

Since it began in 2002, the Tbilisi/Atlanta partnership has streamlined operations at two partner hospitals in the Republic of Georgia—reducing hospital-acquired infections, average lengths of stay, and operating costs, while improving quality of care and patient satisfaction.

In addition to the speeches by Smith and Luten, the ceremony featured remarks by other high-level officials from USAID, by representatives of Emory University, and by the ambassador of the Republic of Georgia to the United States. The ceremony also premiered a showing of a USAID-sponsored documentary about the partnership’s work.