

## AIHA Partners, CAR Nursing Leaders Share Accomplishments at WHO Meeting in Copenhagen

Five nurse leaders from Central Asia—all members of AIHA's regional partnership on nursing education and leadership development—participated in a recent meeting of chief nurses from 44 countries in the World Health Organization's European Region. Held December 5-7 in Copenhagen, Denmark, this was the ninth such gathering of governmental nursing leaders hailing from Europe and Eurasia.

Two AIHA partners—Nurgul Khamzina, director of the Department for Medical Science, Education, and International Affairs at the Ministry of Health in Kazakhstan, and Tamara Saktanova, chief nurse with the Ministry of Health in Kyrgyzstan—were among the key speakers at the conference, which showcased progress in enhancing the nursing profession and in elevating the role of nurses and midwives in Europe.

Their presentations highlighted the progress their countries have made in nursing education reform, particularly efforts to bring nursing education and practice standards closer to international norms. Both presenters women emphasized the important role AIHA's regional nursing partnership and the Central Asia Regional Nursing Coordinating Council have played in the reform efforts. Both projects were established to support a nursing education reform initiative designed to enhance the nursing profession in the region and improve the quality of nursing care in the countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

### *Education and Leadership Development Enhanced through Regional Cooperation*

When talking about the reasons why the Central Asian countries had been falling behind other nations in terms of quality nursing education, Khamzina pinpointed such factors as outdated curricula and teaching methods, poor quality and availability of instructional aids, and the lack of pre-clinical and clinical training facilities. "Despite geographic similarities, nursing school curricula and basic education are quite different in our countries. As of now, not all countries in the region have established baccalaureate programs for nurses," she observed. Noting that regulatory changes are needed if the situation is to improve, Khamzina told the audience that this is what the regional nursing partnership has set out to do by developing and implementing a unified system of nursing undergraduate and graduate education.

Created in 2004, the regional partnership links the University of Minnesota's School of Nursing and Bemidji-based North Country Health Coalition with institutions of undergraduate and graduate nursing education across Central Asia. Khamzina explained that a series of exchanges

last year created a powerful impetus for institutional changes at the Central Asian nursing schools, noting, "The nursing education expertise and skills of our American counterparts helped us make a big step forward in terms of revising and updating curricula at different levels of nursing education. Most importantly, we were able to put in place a structure for basic professional education as well as bachelor and master's degree programs."

She also mentioned the fact that the partnership facilitated a series of training workshops on clinical health assessments, nursing research, and HIV/AIDS, which were conducted by the US partners to enhance the knowledge of regional nursing school faculty. As a result, nursing research methods were introduced in many nursing schools. In addition, Learning Resource Centers equipped with electronic medical libraries and databases, along with Internet access, were established at each partnership site to help integrate information technologies and evidence-based practices into the educational process.

According to Khamzina, the partnership's programs played a critical role in prompting the health ministry officials in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan to launch nursing education reform by making nursing a separate component in the overall system of healthcare education.

### *Regional Coordination Helps Chart a Course for Future Development of Nursing*

While the main goal of the regional nursing partnership is to unify and improve the quality of nursing education in Central Asia, the Nursing Coordinating Council has a much broader agenda. According to Saktanova, the Council consists of 28 nursing leaders from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—seven from each country—who meet regularly to determine policies and strategies in four major areas: improvement of nursing education; enhancement of nursing leadership skills; development of improved nursing practices; and revision of nursing practice standards and education.

Saktanova told attendees that the Council was created in 1999 at a regional nursing conference in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Explaining that it evolved out of the Nursing Initiative introduced by AIHA at its hospital-based partnerships in the early 1990s, she said, "The partnership program's heritage of considerable improvements in nursing prompted us to take steps to sustain the nursing development process in our countries after the majority of the partnerships had graduated."

Pointing out that the Council has facilitated many changes in the countries of the region, Saktanova cited improvements in nursing education and leadership development and primary

care, as well as in the introduction of new professional standards and a new curriculum in the family nurse training program. It also took part in the revision and distribution of a family nursing manual, which was written by the Council chairman with assistance from international experts. And, a series of workshops on nursing leadership and management for chief nurses and physicians from leading healthcare institutions in the region led to the development of regional and national nursing associations that promote modern nursing practices, standards, and guidelines developed by Council.

In addition to introducing nursing baccalaureate programs in three countries of the region, the Council has also taken the lead in providing advanced training to nurse practitioners and members of nursing associations. The training was focused on patient health assessment, breast cancer detection, and grant writing. As a result, 10 nurses received grants for breast cancer prevention from Susan Komen Breast Health project, thus contributing to the improvement of women's health in the region.

According to Saktanova, every year nurse leaders have an opportunity to meet and share their accomplishments at the Council's annual meetings financial support for which were also provided in 2001-2004 by ZdravPlus, a USAID-funded organization. These events are an important vehicle for nursing leadership development and networking because they help the delegates elevate their professional and personal leadership skills and boost their self-esteem.

The Council is also working to ensure that government legislation supports nursing development in the region, Saktanova explained, noting that members have developed proposals on nursing registration, certification, and licensure. As a result, the proposed "Regulations on Nursing Registration System" and "Regulations on Family Nurse" have been approved by the Council and recommended for adoption in all the four countries.

In conclusion, Saktanova emphasized that the goal of each country's nursing reform efforts remains focused on meeting international standards in nursing education and practice, despite of the differences in their immediate priorities and tasks. She also expressed hope that Turkmenistan will join this alliance, uniting all five countries in the region in the quest to build a cohesive system of nursing education and practice.

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