

AIHA Opens Two Healthcare Training Centers in Turkmenistan, Showcases Successful Capacity-building Programs during a Series of Events in December

As Turkmenistan's 5 million people celebrated two landmarks on December 12—the Day of Neutrality and the 10th anniversary of "Health," a national program to build a comprehensive health promotion and disease prevention system that was launched after the collapse of the Soviet Union—AIHA commemorated more than 13 years of its own endeavors to assist the Central Asian nation's healthcare reform efforts. The event culminated with the opening of two new training centers that are designed to help build institutional and human resource capacity for years to come.

During the celebration in Ashgabat, which also marked the opening of a new building housing the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry (MOHMI), healthcare workers and medical students from all over the country, as well as representatives of USAID, AIHA, and other international agencies working to promote modern medical technologies and healthcare practices were among those who attended the ceremony and the facility tour that followed.

One of the highlights of the tour was a visit to the new Statistical Center, which was established to collect medical data from healthcare institutions in the capital city and all five oblasts in Turkmenistan. AIHA sponsored the development of the data collection system's software and provided the specialized training for Gulnaz Yergesheva, the center's director and the staff of the MOHMI as well as specialists in the regions who will input information into the database.

Explaining how the software will allow center staff to gather and analyze medical and administrative statistics that will be delivered on a daily basis from each region of the country, Yergesheva told the group that the Statistical Center will collect information on the number of deliveries, incidence rates of infectious diseases, emergency cases, surgeries, and mortality rates, as well as the number of healthcare provider working at each institution. "This powerful research tool will enable healthcare administrators to understand and effectively respond to



Gulnaz Yergesheva, director of MOHMI's Statistical Center, demonstrates the database that developed with AIHA's support. (Photo: Vira Illiash)

the needs of inpatient and outpatient clinics, including the provision of necessary medications, equipment, and appropriate staffing," she pointed out.

International Conference Highlights AIHA's Contributions to Turkmenistan's Healthcare Reform Efforts

The ministry's new building reopened its doors the next day to host an international scientific practical conference attended by high-level governmental officials and representatives of international donor organizations and businesses who are assisting Turkmenistan in its efforts to bring the national healthcare system up to international standards.



AIHA Executive Director James P. Smith provided an overview of the organization's partnership programs that have been implemented in the country since 1993, citing key accomplishments, such as the opening of the Emergency Medical Services Training Center established by Ashgabat/Richmond partners in response to a presidential initiative to improve basic emergency care services for the population.

AIHA Executive Director James P. Smith shares some highlights from AIHA's 13 years of successful partnership programs in Turkmenistan. (Photo: Vira Illiash)

"The center has not only trained all ambulance crews in the capital city, but has also become an important adjunct training site for medical students," Smith

stated, emphasizing that a direct outcome of the facility's training programs has been the sharp reduction in ambulance response times and the implementation of highly effective evidence-based protocols that are proven to reduce morbidity and mortality. After the center helped lay a solid foundation for improved emergency services, Smith explained, the MOHMI began to focus in earnest on the shift from tertiary care to primary care as a key element of the country's healthcare reform in 1998.

As a result, the program initiated in 1999 by Ashgabat/North Dakota partnership led to the opening of a model Primary Healthcare Center and Family Medicine Training Center (FMTC). One of the most innovative training centers in the countries of the former Soviet Union, the FMTC offers month-long courses taught by a multidisciplinary faculty who train physician-nurse teams using modern adult learning techniques and a practical, skills-based curriculum. Located at Ashgabat Health House No. 1, the FMTC has already trained more than 700 family medicine specialists who now work in primary care settings throughout the capital.

Building on this strong history of collaborative success, AIHA and the ministry entered into a new agreement in 2004. With support from USAID and the Turkmen Government, a project to strengthen management skills within the health system was launched. AIHA helped train key decision-makers within the nation's health system and a core faculty with the goal of expanding and sustaining management education. In late 2005, the Health Management Training Center opened its doors and is helping ministry officials to incorporate best practices in the reform of health financing.

"In addition to our concentrated focus on supporting the improvement of health systems management, our immediate activities continue to build upon and expand our collaborative capacity-building efforts that support the improvement of high-quality basic primary care for the people of Turkmenistan," Smith concluded, noting that AIHA is pleased to be opening a second FMTC that will effectively double the nation's ability to train family care teams, especially those serving rural areas of the country.

New Training Center Will Provide Hands-on Skills to Primary Care Practitioners

The opening ceremony of AIHA's second FMTC in Ashgabat took place the afternoon of December 13 and was attended by medical providers from different primary healthcare institutions throughout the country, MOHMI representatives, and City Health Administration officials, as well as staff from USAID and AIHA. The new training center is located at the Scientific Center of Physiology, an institution that serves patients from all over the country. As such, the FMTC housed these will train primary healthcare providers including family doctors, nurses and feldshers from all regions of Turkmenistan.



James P. Smith, Ashley Moretz, and Ondzhyk Musayev cut the ribbon to commemorate the opening of the second FMTC in Ashgabat. (Photo: Vira Illiash)

The event began with welcoming speeches by the Deputy Head of the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan Ondzhyk Musayev, Director of the USAID Mission in Turkmenistan Ashley Moretz, AIHA Executive Director James P. Smith, and Head Physician of the Railway Hospital Chary Khojageldiyev.

Addressing the staff of the new center, Musayev said, "I feel very proud of you, but I also want to emphasize the responsibility you're taking on. The opening of the FMTC means that not only

the Turkmen nation, but also the American people and their government trust you to lead the primary healthcare reforms in the country and to build a cadre of new healthcare professionals."



During the tour, Guldzhakhan Annamamedova invited guests to see the variety of printed resources available at the PHCTC's library. (Photo: Vira Illiash)

Indeed, as soon as the celebrants entered the facility it became obvious that the future of family medicine in Turkmenistan is in reliable hands. "We are trying to be the best in all aspects, so we can build national capacity by training some of the best healthcare providers in the country," FMTC Director Guldzhakhan Annamamedova told the group as she showed off the center's Learning Resource Center (LRC), library, and classrooms, which are equipped with state-of-the-art educational and audiovisual equipment. She proudly announced that the center had already opened its doors to the first group of trainees on December 1, noting that the healthcare professionals were pleasantly surprised to have access to such a wide range of educational resources in one place. While touring the classrooms, guests also had a chance to see the wide variety of posters, booklets, and mannequins that serve as valuable tools during the hands-on training sessions.

Presenting her team, Annamamedova stressed that each faculty member at the FMTC is responsible for different training components. She also noted that with the goal of making the training courses at the new FMTC as effective and interesting as possible, staff pooled all their creativity to develop and introduce a variety of interactive games, case studies, and situational analyses into the three-week curriculum designed for use at the center. Consisting of a number of modules, this curriculum covers topics such as physical assessment of patients, emergency medical care, disease prevention, and healthy lifestyles.

In addition to the faculty, there are also two other staff members: an information coordinator and evidenced-based practice specialist who work in the LRC. Because AIHA provided the center with a variety of information resources—electronic libraries, a collection of health and medical databases, and medical journals available through the Internet, for example—these specialists help ensure that the curriculum constantly evolves to reflect the latest practices in their respective fields. "Our goal is to supply our trainees with current information on the most effective practices within primary healthcare, while at the same time helping these professionals build new programs and services rooted in evidence-based medicine,"

Annamamedova explained, acknowledging, that she and the staff are constantly brainstorming more ideas for taking the center's training programs to the better level.

"So far we are very happy with the work we're doing, and so are the trainees," Annamamedova said at the conclusion of the event, emphasizing that the primary responsibility of medical workers is to prevent diseases. She noted that the center's staff is ready to do everything possible to achieve this task and to take the country's healthcare provision to a new level. The ceremony concluded with a banquet and concert performed by medical students.



FMTC instructor Gozel Karayeva demonstrates some of the educational materials found in the disease prevention and healthy lifestyles classroom. (Photo: Vira Illiash)

Health Management Training Center Serves as a Tool for Building a Stronger Healthcare System

Following the celebration at the FMTC, representatives of local healthcare authorities and MOHMI officials joined USAID and AIHA staff at the State Medical Institute of Turkmenistan to participate in the opening ceremony of another important educational institution established in Ashgabat with support from AIHA—the Health Management Training Center (HMTTC). The celebration began with a ribbon-cutting ceremony performed by the USAID's Ashley Moretz, AIHA's James P. Smith, and Bayram Shamyradov, head of MOHMI's Health Reform Department.



James P. Smith; Bayram Shamyradov, head of MOHMI's Health Reform Department; and Ashley Moretz participate in the symbolic opening ceremony of the HMTTC. (Photo: Vira Illiash)

Welcoming guests, Sapar Toyliyev, acting rector of the State Medical Institute explained that the center had been operating since September of 2005 and was serving as an engine of health sector reform in Turkmenistan. Continuing, he noted that because the country is working to implement a medical insurance system of healthcare financing, the center plays a critical role in this process by helping to build a cadre of highly qualified healthcare administrators and managers.

Toyliyev also explained that the center's opening coincided with the sixth health management workshop provided by AIHA's partners from the Kazakh School of Public Health, the American University of Armenia, and AUPHA. Acknowledging the efforts of the foreign faculty, who

together with the workshop participants were present at the ceremony, Toyliyev thanked them for their contributions to the country's healthcare reform efforts. Next to take the floor was Ashley Moretz who acknowledged AIHA's role in promoting viable healthcare solutions in Turkmenistan. "Since 1993, USAID has been providing help through AIHA's partnerships and programs and we're grateful to them for the great job they've done in this country," he said, expressing hopes for further productive healthcare sector cooperation between the two countries.

Toyliyev then led participants on a tour of the center, showing them two newly furnished classrooms equipped with 10 computers that have Internet access before moving on to the library, which has a wide range of printed and electronic resources. During the tour, the Acting rector emphasized that in addition to management and financial issues, a great deal of attention is given to the principles of evidence-based medicine in healthcare practice during the training.



HMTC staff and trainees gather for a commemorative photo with foreign faculty and representatives of USAID and AIHA. (Photo: Vira Illiash)

After the tour, Smith and Moretz had a conversation with Toyliyev and the faculty about center's structure and its training program. Because the main goal of the center is to train medical students and health administrators for the country, Smith stressed his hope that the facility will become a real source of new technologies and modern practices, so that the students and administrators educated there can transfer progressive knowledge to a new generation of managers. "I am confident that the provision of healthcare services throughout Turkmenistan will benefit in an extraordinary way from the activities of this center," emphasized Smith. Saying good-bye to the partners AIHA executive director thanked them for a gratifying and exciting journey as both countries continue to seek to improve global health together and congratulated them on their national celebration.

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