

## Making a Woman's Dreams of Motherhood Come True

### *With Expert Care and Support, a High-risk Pregnancy Yields Joyous Results for a Family in Iasi, Romania*

For 26-year-old Anna Ciofu, nothing is more important than family. But after six miscarriages in just three years, she was beginning to think that she might never have even one child. "It wasn't getting pregnant that was my problem, it was staying pregnant," she explains. "Each time, I would make it to the third or fourth month then the contractions would start and I would lose the baby. Even if I went to the hospital at the earliest signs of cramping, it seemed like nothing could be done to save the pregnancy."

It was during one of these trips to the hospital that Ciofu and her husband Bogdan first met Dr. Calin-Adrian Boeru, an ob/gyn at the Center for Reproductive Health and Family Planning in Iasi, a city of some 350,000 inhabitants located in eastern Romania. Affiliated with the Elena Doamna Hospital of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the Center offers primary care and specialized reproductive health services to women of all ages and is home to an AIHA partnership Women's Wellness Center.

Recalling how he first met Ciofu a little more than two years earlier, Boeru explains, "She came to the emergency room crying and afraid. I was struck by how devastated she was to have lost yet another pregnancy. I told her not to dwell on the past, rather to think of this as a new beginning. I told her that from that day on we would work together to discover what was causing these miscarriages, take care of the problem, and see her through to term."

Despite her anguish, Ciofu was hopeful. She agreed to follow the doctor's plan, which included taking oral contraceptives for a period of three months. "I wanted Anna to give her body enough time to truly recover from the trauma of all those miscarriages. During that time, we conducted a series of tests on Anna and her husband to determine if either of them had an infection or some other condition that could explain the situation," Boeru recounts. "We diagnosed Anna with an



After losing six pregnancies to a condition known as cervical incompetence, Anna Ciofu gave birth to a healthy daughter thanks to the care she received at the Iasi Women's Wellness Center. (Photo: Kathryn Utan)

"We diagnosed Anna with an

incompetent cervix—a condition that results in the early onset of contractions when the baby reaches a certain weight. That diagnosis helped us devise a plan for getting her through her next pregnancy."

This close partnership between physician and patient is far from commonplace in Iasi or any other city in Romania. Under the old Soviet-style system of healthcare, doctors didn't involve patients in the process. Instead, it was more likely for them to issue directives they expected to be followed, "no questions asked." As a member of the AIHA partnership linking the Iasi Center for Reproductive Health and Family Planning with Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, however, the center's staff has adopted a client-centered approach that is the hallmark of AIHA's Women's Wellness Center model. This means that patients are openly informed about their diagnosis and the various treatment options available to them. For Ciofu, it underscored the crucial role she had to play in preserving her pregnancy.



Dr. Calin-Adrian Boeru checks on Anna's daughter, Bogdana, the day after he delivered her. His close supervision and expert care—along with the support and attention of many other clinicians at the Women's Wellness Center—led to a joyous end to a difficult pregnancy. (Photo: Kathryn Utan)

In anticipation of conceiving again, Boeru advised Ciofu to discontinue the birth control pills, eat a healthy diet, get plenty of rest, and try to let nature take its course. It didn't take long for her to become pregnant. "As soon as the doctor confirmed that I was pregnant, we started talking about what I would need to do to help ensure that I carried this baby to term. He explained that there could be complications and that while we would hope for the best, we would also need to be prepared for the worst," Ciofu says. And there were plenty of scares along the way, she admits.

"At her first clinical exam, her cervix looked weak. I suspected that it wouldn't be able to sustain a healthy full-term pregnancy, so we decided to perform a surgical procedure to reinforce it with sutures," Boeru explains, noting that he told Ciofu she would have to restrict her activity and stay off her feet as much as possible or risk yet another miscarriage. "She promised she would stay home and rest, but after a few days of that she would go back to work at a local market. Sometimes when a patient is feeling better, she may not realize she still must be careful," he continues.

For Ciofu, the return to her normal routine caught up with her in her 27th week when she started having contractions. She had to be hospitalized for several weeks while Boeru and his

colleagues at the Center worked to stabilize her condition. "Although we knew it was possible for her baby to survive at that early stage, we wanted to keep her inside her mother's womb for as long as possible," Boeru explains. When she reached 32 weeks, Ciofu was allowed to go home in the evenings but for the remainder of her pregnancy she came back each day for tests and some "doctor enforced bed rest," Boeru says with a smile. "During this whole period we not only had to look after Anna's physical health, we also had to nurture her psychological health. She was terrified that she would lose the baby and under a great deal of emotional stress," he acknowledges.

Ciofu agrees. "After each miscarriage, I cannot begin to describe the emptiness and disappointment I felt. The last time was the worst of all because I made it almost five months before losing the baby. It was a little girl. I got to hold her for a few minutes and my heart was broken," she says, looking away to hide her tears.

But those tears didn't last long. Just a few hours later, Dr. Boeru told Ciofu—who was then at 38 weeks—that she would be taken to the delivery room for a Caesarean-section later that day. "All along, we told her that she would need to be prepared to deliver surgically. I didn't want to tell her too far in advance, though, because every time she got nervous these past few weeks she would start having contractions. This caused the baby's heart rate to jump sharply," he explains. "When I told her that today was her child's birthday, she looked at me with so much faith and confidence. That's why, for me, caring for patients isn't so much a job as a sacred duty," Boeru maintains.

The long, painful road Anna Ciofu traveled to get to that day yielded a joyful result—a healthy daughter she named Bogdana after the baby's father. Looking at her child with all the love in her heart, she shifted her gaze to Boeru and whispered "thank you."