

## New PMTCT Training Center in Temirtau Opens its Doors to Fight Against Pediatric HIV in Central Asia

Although the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Kazakhstan is still in its early stages, AIHA has for several years been working closely with the country to help develop strategies capable of assuring the health and wellbeing of the nation's future generations. The February 6 opening of a regional training center for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) in the Kazakh city of Temirtau brought this Central Asian nation one step closer to its goal of stemming the rising tide of the HIV epidemic before it spirals out of control.

Located at the Temirtau City Maternity House, the new center will provide PMTCT training services to healthcare practitioners and allied professionals from Kazakhstan and other countries in Central Asia. The regional training center is equipped with computers, office equipment, and various training aids. It will draw on the skills and experience of national experts from Almaty, Karaganda, Pavlodar, and Temirtau who have participated in numerous PMTCT trainings sponsored by AIHA and now will disseminate their knowledge to other specialists in the region.



During the opening ceremony, Saule Amanzholova, director of the Temirtau City Maternity House, briefs local journalists on the PMTCT program and its objectives. (Photo: Pavel Guliayev)

The opening ceremony was followed by the initiation of a PMTCT training course attended by 25 senior faculty members representing neonatology, anesthesiology, obstetrics, gynecology, and pediatrics departments from medical schools throughout Kazakhstan. The program included instruction in the WHO/CDC PMTCT Generic Training Package, which has been adapted by AIHA to reflect national policies, country-specific epidemiological data on HIV/AIDS, and Kazakhstan's national protocols on HIV. Other topics covered were PMTCT for ob/gyns and voluntary counseling and testing.

According to AIHA Program Coordinator for Central Asia Bauyrzhan Amirov, trainees demonstrated a keen interest in the workshop's content and eagerly participated in all activities and assignments. As a result of the training, participant knowledge about PMTCT issues increased by 64 percent when pre- and post-tests were compared.



Workshop participants listen to a presentation on methods of HIV diagnosis. (Photo: Pavel Guliayev)

Participants cited the use of antiretroviral therapy to prevent vertical transmission, prevention of HIV/AIDS in the workplace, and discrimination against HIV-positive patients as some of the most important topics that were discussed during the workshop.

Nurila Maltabarova, a professor with the Department of Anesthesiology and Resuscitation at the Kazakh State Medical Academy, explained that even though the rate of HIV cases in Kazakhstan is

low, clinicians can benefit greatly from knowing more about the virus and how to protect both themselves and their patients from its spread. This knowledge will benefit people living with HIV/AIDS as well because it will help lessen the stigma and discrimination they face, allowing them easier access to healthcare and social support services. "We want to introduce these topics into the training curriculum to help our students be prepared to respond appropriately to the problem when and if they face it," she says.

In this connection, Maltabarova underscored the value of the wide range of educational materials on PMTCT that all workshop participants received and will be able to share with students and faculty at their respective institutions upon their return. Moreover, the Medical Academy she represents has plans to incorporate a PMTCT module into the training curriculum for all specialists who will be working in the delivery room, including ob/gyns, surgeons, and anesthesiologists, among others.

"Knowledge is a key strength of any specialist, but in medicine it is critically important because human lives hang in the balance," Maltabarova concludes, stressing that the ability of future doctors to effectively prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV is a particularly valuable strategy; it stands guard over the health of the most important citizens of the country—the children.