

Strengthening Primary Care in Turkmenistan

In 1999, AIHA established a partnership linking the Turkmen Ministry of Health and Medical Industry and Health House No. 1 in Ashgabat with the University of North Dakota, the North Dakota State Health Department, and a consortium of other healthcare provider organizations.

The Ashgabat/North Dakota partnership opened a Family Medicine Training Center at the Health House in May 2001. Since then, nearly all primary care professionals and medical school faculty in the capital have undergone training at the center and new education topics are constantly being added to the program.

The Family Medicine Training Center has six instructors, including three nurses. All of them were trained in North Dakota and received on-going instruction at numerous family medicine workshops and conferences conducted by AIHA. Primarily, the center works with former general practitioners and pediatricians who, after training, return to their medical institutions ready to provide a broad range of healthcare services to people of all backgrounds.

“Our center has the latest equipment, all kinds of mannequins, and visual training aids that help us show our students the changes that occur in the body with different diseases and how to detect them during clinical examinations,” says Aina Klychdurdyeva, director of the center. “Development of practical skills is the most important aspect of training for healthcare professionals. All of our courses devote 70 percent of training time to the acquisition of hands-on clinical skills, which is a unique approach in Turkmenistan.”

The standard training course at the center lasts four weeks and one-week training modules cover otolaryngology, ophthalmology, cardiovascular diseases, and women’s and children’s health, Klychdurdyeva explains, noting that the facility has been equipped with special classrooms for each of these topic areas. She is quick to point out that the instructional approach is very rigorous – and very effective.



An instructor at the Scientific Center of Physiology Family Medicine Training Center demonstrates birthing techniques to a group of practitioners from Turkmenistan’s outlying regions.



“On average, our students experience a 30 percent increase in their knowledge by the end of the course, but that is not the end of our contact with them. We’re equipped with computers, Internet access, and many audiovisual aids, so they routinely come back to us for any medical information they might need. Other healthcare institutions in our country don’t have this capacity,” Klychdurdyeva says.

Patient education and outreach, such as this class for expectant mothers, plays a key role in the provision of quality primary care.

Another unique aspect of the center is its team approach to care. The concept – which trains physician-nurse teams who work together to

provide care – was new to the region and initially met with resistance. It didn’t take long, though, for everyone involved to recognize the value of this methodology and start to adopt it into their systems. Now doctors and nurses study the same topics together in the same groups.

Some 1,000 medical school instructors and healthcare professionals from Ashgabat have earned diplomas from the center. Among them is a team of instructors for a second Family Medicine Training Center, which – thanks to USAID and AIHA support –opened in December 2005 at the Scientific Center of Physiology to provide training to healthcare practitioners from rural areas spanning Turkmenistan.

Published in the Winter 2007 edition of “Connections,” a quarterly newsletter highlighting the American International Health Alliance’s development programs in the EECA Region.