

For Tuberculosis Patients in Moldova, Community-based Support Group Leads to Improved Outcomes

Sometimes called the northern capital of Moldova, Balti is the country's second largest city and, as such enjoys a sound economy with many business and industrial enterprises, as well as several universities, colleges, and medical institutions. Unfortunately, Balti also has one of the country's highest rates of new TB infections, with 200 cases per 100,000 inhabitants.

AIHA launched a public awareness campaign, "TB is Curable: See a Doctor," in Balti in fall 2005 through its USAID-supported Strengthening Tuberculosis Control in Moldova Project. An unexpected result came in the form of a group of patients who realized the importance of peer support to the recovery process.

Speranta Terrei – Earth's Hope – launched its work in March 2006 and was officially registered as an NGO later that year. Founded by a small group of healthcare providers, social workers, and patients with AIHA's assistance, *Speranta Terrei* began training volunteers to monitor the treatment of TB patients undergoing out-patient care. They also oversee preventive treatment for children who have been exposed to tuberculosis with the blessing of the management of the TB Dispensary.

Speranta Terrei currently has a core group of 12 volunteers who provide support to some 60 patients. The organization even has "pinch hitters" who have been trained and can fill in when any of the regular volunteers are unavailable. In addition to DOTS – or directly observed therapy – volunteers offer guidance and advice on a host of topics such as nutrition, prevention, hygiene, and even referrals for legal counseling. Equally important for many TB patients is the kindness and social support the volunteers provide.

"Our medical staff is very small and we wouldn't be able to visit patients in their homes," says TB Dispensary Chief Physician Aglaya Cracium. "We're very grateful to *Speranta Terrei*."



Volunteer Sergei Tinica (left) visits a TB patient and ensures that he takes his medication.

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