

Prompt Treatment Helps a Young Girl in Baku

Nine-year-old Rufina didn't feel well as she made her way home from school one afternoon last spring. As the normally vivacious girl slowly walked along the dusty street to the IDP settlement where she, her parents, her older sister Guba, and younger brother Tural live, her head began to ache and her joints stiffened. She wondered how she would make it up the four flights of stairs to the small apartment where her family has lived since they fled their home in the village of Alibaili nearly 10 years ago.

"I knew Rufina was ill. She had been fighting a cold for a few days and her throat was very red and irritated, making it a little difficult for her to swallow," Yegana Samadova, Rufina's mother explains, noting that her daughter also had a slight fever. "We don't live in the best of conditions—this building was once a hostel for a sports institute and it is very crowded," she continues, noting that there are no toilets or bathrooms inside and they have frequent power outages. "We also have to go outside to get water several times each day, lugging the heavy jugs up to the apartment step-by-step. It's easy for people—especially children—to get very sick under these circumstances, so we have to be extremely careful."

Later that night, after everyone had gone to bed, Yegana remembers being disturbed by a strange noise. "I thought I heard one of the children speaking, so I went to investigate. That's when I saw Rufina thrashing about under the covers, mumbling incoherently," she says, describing the panic she felt when she discovered her child was burning up with a fever. "Her skin felt like it was on fire and I couldn't seem to wake her. I was afraid that she would go into convulsions if I didn't do something immediately to get her temperature down."

But what could she do? It was the middle of the night, the electricity was out, and she had no medication in the house. Immediately Yegana thought of her cousin, Rasmiya Zeynalova, a nurse who lives across the hall and often treats people in the building. Using a candle to light her way, Yegana rushed to Zeynalova's room. Although it was very late, the nurse answered the door almost immediately and was faced with the sight of a distraught Yegana, who grabbed



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Cousins Yegana and Rasmiya (above left and right), with their children. Both families fled their war-torn home in Azerbaijan's Zangelan Region and have been living in an IDP enclave in Baku for almost 10 years. A cheerful girl who loves to draw, play jump rope with her friends, and work on mathematics problems in school, Rufina is grateful that nurse Rasmiya Zeynalova was able to help her.

her hand and begged her to help Rufina. "I told Rasmiya to come right away, that I thought my child was dying," Yegana recounts, noting that Zeynalova quickly snatched up her nurse's bag and a pen light before rushing to examine the sick girl.

"Rufina's temperature was so high—more than 40 degrees Celsius—and she seemed delirious, but Rasmiya remained calm," Yegana recalls, explaining that the nurse used a digital thermometer she pulled from the bag she carried with her, as well as an otoscope and tongue depressor to check the girl's throat using the pen light for illumination. Zeynalova then gave Rufina an injection to lower the fever and gave Yegana instructions for her care, promising to check back the next morning.

"I didn't even know Rasmiya was in our apartment until she gave me the shot," Rufina says, smiling shyly. "The next day, I felt a little better and Rasmiya sent my mother to the pharmacy to buy some medicine that they used to swab my throat so it

Life is difficult for the nearly 580,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in Azerbaijan. For those who have settled in Baku's densely populated Narimanov District, primary care services are provided through local polyclinics. AIHA's Baku/Portland partners are working to improve the quality and accessibility of these services, in part, by offering targeted training for nurses working with IDPs and refugees that emphasizes the basic skills necessary to provide comprehensive care in clinical settings and during home visits. This is the story of a young girl who was treated by one such nurse; the nurse's story is on the other side.



would heal quicker. I'm glad she lives so close to us and, when I was completely well, I went to her apartment to thank her for being such a good nurse."

Acknowledging that her family has been very lucky as far as their health is concerned, Yegana echoes her daughter's sentiments about Rasmiya and the care she provides to the IDP community. "Aside from the incident with Rufina, we haven't had any major trouble and, whatever ailments we have had, Rasmiya has always been more than capable of treating. She gives us a sense of safety and hope. We all know how skilled and caring she is and life would be even more difficult without her close by."

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Bringing Primary Care to Baku's IDP Community

Walking through the halls of the Baku building where she lives, it doesn't take long to realize how important primary care nurse Rasmiya Zeynalova is to the other IDPs who reside there. People eagerly call out praise for this kind and gentle woman who takes care of them when they are sick, gives advice when they have questions, and offers comfort in a place where the very notion of security is alien.

"The thing that pleases me most about my job is when I get to see first-hand that someone feels better because of the care I provide," Zeynalova says. Of course, that is one of the best parts of any nurse's job, she admits, "But, here in the IDP settlement, it is even more rewarding."

Some 26,000 IDPs live in the Narimanov District, a densely-populated section of the city. Most of them—Zeynalova included—fled their homes in the early 1990s to escape the border conflict with Armenia.

"Many people from my village settled in the complex where I live now," Zeynalova explains, noting that it is comprised of four buildings that used to be sports hostels. "I was a pediatric nurse back home and began working in the same capacity at Polyclinic #14 in 1998."

Responsible for overseeing the care of 900 children—one-third of them IDPs—Zeynalova spends three hours each day in her office and another three conducting home visits. "Because of economic conditions here, most infants are born at home so, for newborns, a physician/nurse team makes a home visit within the first week. Their parents are supposed to bring them to the Polyclinic for their polio and tuberculosis vaccinations when they are five or six days old," she says, noting that if the child hasn't been inoculated within the first two months, the vaccinations are administered during a home visit.

"As a nurse, I visit newborns every week for the first month or so to make sure the baby is thriving, that the umbilical cord is not infected, and to answer any questions



PHOTOS: SUZANNE E. GRINMAN



Thanks to training and supplies she received through her work with AIHA's Baku/

Portland partnership, nurse Rasmiya Zeynalova is better able to care for her patients, one-third of whom are IDPs. The medical bags given to partnership nurses are filled with equipment and supplies—a digital thermometer, otoscope, blood pressure cuffs, bandages, and antiseptic, for example—that nurses use on home visits.

the new parents might have," Zeynalova continues. Responsible for keeping accurate records about the development of her young patients and for ensuring they receive a physical examination at least once a year, she makes notations on how well they sleep and any illnesses or abnormalities she observes. "If there is a problem, I either address it myself or, if it is serious, ask one of the doctors to examine the child."

When the Polyclinic—through the Narimanov District Health Administration—became involved in AIHA's Baku/Portland partnership, Zeynalova participated in a series of training workshops developed to give nurses who work with IDPs the special skills necessary to address their health-related needs. These workshops helped Zeynalova

Disease prevention, health promotion, and the treatment of existing illnesses are key elements underpinning AIHA's Primary Healthcare Program. Partners work to address the needs of their communities, integrating health-care into the framework of social services and increasing opportunities to reach the broadest segment of the population. In Azerbaijan, the Baku/Portland partners developed model "medical bags" to enhance the ability of physicians and nurses to provide care while treating internally displaced persons. This is the story of one nurse—an IDP herself—who uses the equipment everyday; the story of a young girl she treated is on the other side.

broaden the scope of her work, enabling her to provide care for adults as well as children. She also received a nurse's bag complete with medical equipment including a stethoscope, blood pressure cuffs, digital thermometer, otoscope, and many other useful supplies.

"I had seen many of the instruments in the bag before and was familiar with most, but some—the otoscope, for example—I had to attend a partnership seminar to learn how to use," she says, pointing out that her new knowledge and medical equipment have combined to make her job much easier. But, the real change is in her attitude. "I've been a nurse for a long time, but this training I received has really changed the way I look at myself and my profession. I have much more confidence in my ability to give my patients the care that they need," Zeynalova maintains.

And, patients such as nine-year-old Rufina, would agree. "Rufina's mother knocked on my door late one night this past spring, sobbing that her daughter was dying. I grabbed my bag and ran over there," she recounts, explaining that the child's temperature was dangerously high. "I gave her an injection that brought the fever down and followed her recovery closely," Zeynalova concludes, laughing as she says, "Now Rufina says she doesn't need to visit the doctor—she has me to take care of her."

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