

A Visit to Kansas City

By Barbara Ruben

Pavol Vlcek gazed out the window of the Truman Medical Center toward downtown Kansas City, which was blanketed with a gleaming layer of snow. All of us would like to see that the snow falling in Bratislava would be as clean and pure as it is here. This symbolizes everything we are hoping for, said Vlcek, who is deputy of the municipality of Petralka and a member of the Aid to Children at Risk Foundation. Shrouded in a haze of pollution, Petralka's predominant color is gray, from the massive high-rise housing projects to the sooty snow.

Vlcek and four other members of the partnership visited their partners in Kansas City, Missouri, for the first time in January. During the two-week stay to help shape their healthy communities program, they had the opportunity to learn about everything from protecting air quality to protecting pregnant women and their babies from drugs.

We want to give you an overview of the variety of issues faced by residents of Kansas City, from babies to the elderly, and the programs we've developed to manage them, said Roger Metz, director of CQI/TQM and strategic planning at Truman Medical Center East.

The group started off their visit with a formal signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on January 8. Signing the MOU were Jantrová, PhD, president of the Aid to Children at Risk Foundation in Bratislava; Tom Trnovec, PhD, director of the Institute of Preventive and Clinical Medicine in Bratislava, Bernice Bennett of AIHA and Daniel Couch, deputy executive director of Truman Medical Center.

The healthy community program is the major project we'll be concerned with in health care between the United States and the Slovak Republic, said Anton Gajdos, PhD, first secretary of the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Washington, D.C. We are astounded that so much has been accomplished in such a short period. I think it will be very beneficial for health care in both countries.

Partners toured both of the Truman hospitals, one in downtown Kansas City, serving primarily inner-city residents and the other in a rural area west of town. In addition, they visited clinics in city schools and toured community mental health and drug addiction prevention programs. A highlight of the trip included a meeting with Missouri Gov. Mel Carnahan and Missouri lawmakers. Partners also traveled to several healthy communities in Missouri that are part of the Community Health Assessment Resource Team (CHART), which advocates grassroots-initiated community assessment and change.

We have a lot of the same problems as in the United States, but don't have the scope of programs to deal with them, said Jantrová.

Dan Mueller, PhD, CHART project director with the Missouri Dept. of Health, said, They have all the same questions as Americans do when they embark on the healthy community process: How will you implement the plans? How will we have the money? How can we get people to change? But the answer I tell them is that all of it has to come from you. You have to make it work. That's what it's all about.