

Tallinn Women's Clinic Hosts First Ladies

In July, US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and Estonia First Lady Helle Meri visited Estonia's Tallinn Central Hospital Women's Clinic, a model for women's health care in Eastern Europe. The clinic leads Estonia in such fields as gynecologic and laparoscopic surgery, care of pre-term deliveries and newborns, and prenatal care for pregnant women with diabetes.

As part of her whirlwind tour through Eastern Europe, Mrs. Clinton spent an hour at Tallinn Central, an AIHA partner hospital teamed with The George Washington University Medical Center (GWU) in Washington, DC, to learn about its innovative approaches to women's health care. Accompanied by Mrs. Meri, Mrs. Clinton saw the outpatient clinic, where cervical cancer screening, fetal ultrasounds and sexually transmitted disease treatment are provided to patients; the in-service education center, where medical staff attend lectures on topics like neonatal resuscitation; prenatal classrooms, where midwives teach Lamaze-type breathing and relaxation exercises; and the surgical suite, where three newly refurbished surgical areas are used for diagnostic procedures, infertility surgery and tumor removal.

Mrs. Clinton praised the three- to four-day length of stay average for new mothers at Tallinn Central, comparing it to the 24-hour limit that most US health insurance companies impose on maternity stays. "I don't think the stay of a new mother in a hospital should be determined by anyone other than doctors and nurses," she said.

She also spoke with an expectant mother and a couple with a newborn, and stressed the importance of a father's involvement during delivery.

The site of one of every six births in Estonia, the clinic houses 123 beds and four inpatient departments, and handles 60,000 outpatient visits a year. The staff has introduced a "family delivery program," which encourages fathers to participate in the births of their children (60 percent of all clinic deliveries are now "family" assisted), and plans on opening an in vitro fertilization lab early next year, where an estimated 300 procedures will be performed annually.

During Mrs. Clinton's tour, representatives from GWU and AIHA presented a USAID-funded contribution of new laparoscopic equipment to the women's clinic, to be used in abdominal and pelvic surgeries.

Lauding US efforts to provide assistance to Estonia, Mrs. Clinton said on her trip to Tallinn: "What we are creating through these partnerships is an ethos of responsibility, caring and initiative that allows people to participate in civic life and shape their own destinies."