

In the Hands of Nurses: NIS Conference Highlights Leadership Achievements

By Joanne Neuber

From creating greater educational opportunities to reducing infection rates, nurses attending the AIHA Second Annual Nursing Conference opened the three-day program by presenting their advances over the last year. Building on the US National Nurses Week--which was celebrated during the same week as the AIHA conference--theme of "celebrate our past, envision our future," more than 200 nurses from the NIS and US convened in Almaty, Kazakhstan from May 6 to 8 to share their achievements since the first nursing conference in Golitsino, Russia in 1995.

For example, nurses at the Almaty Medical College created the first bachelor's degree nursing programs in Kazakhstan. Since it began in the spring of 1995, the program has been adopted by 12 other nursing colleges in Kazakhstan, and was recently named as a model nursing program by a team of US nurse leaders [see box]. The number of nurses who now hold the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in nursing from the newly created 45 baccalaureate programs in the Russian Federation has increased from 8 percent in 1992 to 24 percent in 1995.

Nurses at the Second Tashkent Medical Institute in Uzbekistan have created the first ambulatory care women's health clinic in Central Asia, which is operated solely by senior nurse leaders who have received advanced training in obstetrics and gynecology. Stavropol, Russia partners created a four-week clinical and administrative practicum for senior nurse leaders as a means of promoting ongoing nurse training and ensuring that qualified nurse managers have the necessary skills to educate other nurses within the hospital.

Nearly every hospital partnership has created a nursing association within its institution, and most associations have been adopted as national nursing programs, receiving the support and recognition of the Ministries of Health and Education.

"There is a real empowerment of nurses taking place in our partner hospitals," noted Laura Hurt, RN, with Grady Health System in Atlanta, Georgia. "We owe that to the commitment of our nurse leaders who have the vision for change."

This has also brought about improvements in patient care. Nurses from City Clinical Hospital No. 2 in Vladivostok, Russia reported a decline in nosocomial infections, from 8 percent in 1994 to 4 percent in 1995. They attribute this to the creation of a nursing committee that ensures adherence to infection control protocols within the hospital.

Similarly, the incidence of serum-transmitted hepatitis in patients at the Kazak Scientific Research Center for Pediatrics and Children's Surgery fell by more than 2.5 times in the past three years, and complications following catheterization fell from 68 percent in 1993 to 12 percent in 1996. Both declines are attributed to increased infection control protocols for nurses, physicians and other health care personnel at the Center and the educational role of nurse managers.

"The nurse's role has been increasing, and I think that is right because 80 percent of all work rests on the shoulders of nurses," said first-year nursing student Madina Izimova. "I'm very proud to be in the nursing profession because I recognize that our health is in the hands of nurses."

The conference allowed nurses to envision further reforms, from expanding nursing roles to increasing education opportunities. Reaching these goals depends on the dedication of NIS

health care professionals and ministries of health, according to Kazak Deputy Minister of Health Maksut Kulzhanov. "But we cannot deny the international participation that helped to make these [current] health reforms possible," he added.

The conference focused on three main leadership topics: skill building, curriculum reform and association development.

Skill Building

The first day's topic emphasized the importance of developing leadership skills in team building, change management, human resource management and budgeting. Throughout the day, panelists from the US and NIS shared effective ways to be a better nurse leader.

"To be effective leaders, we must unite and learn how to fly," explained Liya Mamaladze, senior nurse at Tbilisi City Hospital No. 2 and nurse representative for the newly created nursing committee of the Georgian Ministry of Health. Mamaladze, joined by Laura Hurt, explained that nurses must redirect the way they work together by sharing leadership responsibilities in the same way birds trade off in leading the flock. In the past, nursing leaders were like buffalo, said Hurt. "If the herd leader went over the cliff, the herd followed...As leaders, we must learn to move from working harder to moving more swiftly--we are moving from [being] buffalo and are learning how to fly."

The nurse manager is instrumental in this paradigm shift, said Elizabeth Vasquez, RN, coordinator for nursing education, Cleveland Clinic Foundation. She noted the importance of adapting to and managing change in the hospital setting, citing the help of nurse managers in the creation of a new dialysis unit and the introduction of new nosocomial infection protocols at her partner hospital in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. Although change is important for the continual improvement in patient care, Vasquez said, she agreed with conference participants that making lasting change can be especially difficult due to the current economic conditions and supply constraints faced by many NIS hospitals.

"Nobody likes change, with, perhaps the exception of babies in wet diapers," noted Vasquez. "Yet if you don't manage change, change will manage you."

During the discussion, Galina Jusapayova, a senior nurse at Semipalatinsk Oblast Hospital in Kazakhstan, cited ways nurse leaders in her hospital have managed change. Jusapayova noted an increasing incidence of cancer in Semipalatinsk Oblast that goes undetected until stage three or four, due in part to an uninformed public of the risks of certain cancers. Financial constraints have greatly hindered regional efforts to increase public awareness of early detection techniques and of hazards linked to certain cancers.

To change this pattern, nurses at the hospital have created a cost-effective learning resource center to educate patients on various topics that can improve their health, including breast self-examination, nutritional information, and the hazards of alcohol and tobacco. Nurses at Oblast and Central City Hospitals in Semipalatinsk have also worked with colleagues in the production of the oblast's first public health awareness campaign, televised twice on a local television channel to increase awareness of the dangers surrounding cancer.

"Our program has been very effective," noted Jusapayova, citing a 36 percent decline in childhood mortality from cancer for the oblast since 1994, which she attributes to increased patient education leading to earlier detection.

Curriculum Reform

The second day of the conference highlighted the importance of updating nursing curricula as a tool for the further development of nursing in the NIS. Galina Perfiljeva, dean of the

Sechenov Nursing School in Moscow, Russia--which offers the first master's degree program for nursing in the NIS--noted that the quality of nursing education is changing throughout the NIS due to efforts by partnership hospitals to develop core nursing curricula, nursing competencies, clinical skill building, pre- and post-operative teaching and clinical nurse educator positions.

Perfiljeva reported that the first graduates of the master's degree program are now working as nurse leaders in clinical hospitals, hospices and research settings in Moscow, Russia. "It is only the beginning, but our advances in nursing education are definitely enhancing the role of the nurse," Perfiljeva said.

In the past, nursing education consisted of two years of study, with little or no clinical training or continuing education. Current reforms in nursing education will allow nurses to receive advanced clinical and management training. Many hospitals in the NIS have already expanded their nursing curricula to a four-year program. Almaty Medical College's model four-year bachelor's degree program for nursing has already been adopted in 12 nursing colleges in Kazakhstan and is under review in numerous other colleges throughout Central Asia. Galina Beisenova, vice president of Almaty Medical College, noted the emphasis on nursing management, information systems, hospital-wide management and clinical education as core areas of focus in the new curriculum.

Continuing education is also a key component of nursing education, noted Olga Kaplenko, chief operating room nurse and clinical nurse educator at the Kyrgyz Institute of Oncology and Radiology in Bishkek. Kaplenko explained how her Bishkek-Kansas City partners have expanded the scope of their nursing administration program to include advanced clinical skills training.

Begun in early 1996, the continual nursing skills laboratories in the Institute of Oncology and Radiology and the Institute of Obstetrics and Pediatrics are run by senior nurse administrators trained during an intensive partnership nursing administration program held in Kansas City in June 1994. These skills laboratories are designed to provide all nurses in both partnership hospitals with advanced clinical skills in various areas of health care, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation and breast cancer screening. As of May 1996, every nurse within both partner hospitals had received 72 hours of advanced clinical skills training at the laboratory, and every student nurse planning to work within these hospitals was receiving training at the laboratory.

Kaplenko described herself as a patient educator, and said that nurses' newly learned skills are being transferred directly to the patient. Patients at Bishkek partnership hospitals are educated on ways to conduct breast self-examinations and creating healthy lifestyles. Kaplenko noted that recently created nursing standards for different clinical procedures also help ensure that proper clinical techniques are applied by nurses at their hospitals.

Citing recent changes in US educational standards for nurses, Patricia Schafer, RN, Director of Nursing Research and Education at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, explained that nurse leaders must adjust to the changing needs of the patients, families and environments in which they work. Schafer noted nursing research as a critical component of ongoing nursing education reform that can allow nurses to learn the most efficient means of helping patients. She also encouraged group dialogue between nursing faculty and students as a way to transfer knowledge from the educator to the student.

One of the most successful continuing education programs is the St. Petersburg Sokolov Hospital ongoing nursing education program. Developed three years ago, the Sokolov program recently updated its 72-hour curriculum for operating room and surgical nurses to meet growing demands placed on nurses in these departments. Directed by nurse educator Tatiana Mikheeva, the Sokolov continuing education nursing program is one of the first programs in

the Russian Federation that provides nurses with practical clinical skills designed to meet their specific department needs.

Recognizing the importance of promoting continuous learning, the Russian Federation Ministry of Health recently instated Ministerial diplomas for nurses who complete the advanced course work at Sokolov Hospital. The Sokolov nursing program is also being shared with other AIHA partnerships, including the Georgian hospital partnerships, which are currently developing a continuing education program based on the St. Petersburg model.

Nurses at the conference also got continuing education credit for their participation through Strong Memorial Hospital/University of Rochester in New York, an internationally accredited institution.

Leadership Through Association Development

On the final day of the conference, nurse leaders discussed the importance of association development, management and strategies to promote their growth, including communications and newsletter development, networking and marketing, working through committees and conference planning.

Kay Oliver, RN, director of education services at the Iowa Health System in Des Moines, Iowa, discussed methods of working through nursing committees to promote advances in nursing. Teamwork and sharing are key components of successful work in a committee, noted Oliver.

Alina Vaschilo, head nurse of the Radiation Medicine Institute Hospital in Minsk, Belarus, noted the recent creation of a nursing committee comprised of senior nurse managers. The committee is responsible for ensuring that nurses pass the hospital's new nursing qualification standards. Every five years, nurses must requalify by meeting minimum clinical and administrative standards. Ongoing clinical and administrative skills labs in the hospital help prepare nurses for these exams. Many other partners have set up similar nursing committees that oversee continuing nursing education programs.

Ukrainian partners cited their success in creating a nursing association last year in Kiev, Ukraine. The association members meet regularly to share ideas and outcomes of their respective partnership nursing programs.

Efforts are also underway to develop nursing newsletters and other educational materials to unite nursing efforts, not only within respective countries, but throughout the NIS. The Armenian Nursing Association, which elected its first president in April 1996, brings together the nursing efforts of both AIHA hospital partnerships in Yerevan. Armina Voskanian, senior nurse at Erebuni Hospital and president of the Armenian Nursing Association, is working with nurses from all over Armenia to share and develop informational materials on advanced clinical skills for nurses in the area of women's health.

Finally, many partners have hosted region-wide nursing conferences to disseminate information on administrative and clinical nurse skills. Bishkek partners shared the results of their August 1995 regional conference on nursing administration. The Moscow-Boston partnership also spoke on the effectiveness of their second annual nursing conference on infection control, which was held in November 1995.

"The wheel of learning helps us evolve in our roles as nurses," said Ann Marie Brooks, RN, DNSc, FAAN, senior director and director of nursing at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester, New York, at the closing conference session, encouraging nurse leaders to learn from the work already completed by the nursing associations. "Let us work together and use knowledge and each other, to let nursing be the best profession that can be."

Next year's nursing conference is scheduled for March 1997 in Kiev, Ukraine. Until then, conference organizer Sharon Weinstein, RN, challenged nurses to continue to develop in their profession. "The change process is ongoing. The future is now, and now we know the future is to reach out to others," she said.

AIHA NIS Nursing Task Force co-chair Tatiana Mikheeva echoed Weinstein's message: "This is truly a time to honor our past and envision our future," she said. "It really is an exciting time to be a nurse."

A Kazak Welcome

Nurses attending the conference traveled the path of the ancient caravan trade route known as the Great Silk Road on their way to Almaty. The conference was held in the Alatau Sanatorium, large conference center which rests at the base of the snow-capped Tien Shan mountain range and takes its name with one of the first nomadic clans known to inhabit the Kazak lands over 3,000 years ago.

Fourth-year nursing students of the Almaty Medical College wore colorful, floor-length native costumes, complete with engraved copper, and sang traditional Kazak songs to greet the 200 nurses from across the NIS and US. Their welcome was followed by an exchange of favorite NIS and US national songs, bringing together nurses from over half of the states in the United States and 11 of the 15 former Soviet republics.

This spirit of sharing carried over to the pins, bags, and other conference materials donated by US companies and hospitals. Each US partnership provided NIS partners with nursing uniforms from their hospitals.

In welcoming the nurses to conference, Kazak Minister of Health Vasiliy Deyatko, MD, noted the importance of nursing reforms already underway. "The change and preparation of nurses in our country is very important...for improving the health of women and children throughout Kazakhstan," he said.

"Ten years from now when we look back on the work we've accomplished, we will see that the success was possible due to nurses," noted AIHA Executive Director James P. Smith at the opening banquet. "And I think it is especially important that we have the conference here in Almaty, because a lot of the nursing energy comes from our partners in Central Asia."

American Team Commends Model Almaty Nursing Program

During the nursing conference, a two-member US nursing team conducted an assessment of Almaty Medical College's new curriculum designed to prepare nurses to move into manager roles. They focused on the fourth year of the program, from which the first nursing students are graduating this spring. This baccalaureate program is the first offered for nurses in Central Asia.

"We found the program to be very effective. The core curriculum is comprehensive, current, and offers timely, relevant concepts designed to prepare fourth-year students for nurse managers' roles," said Ann Marie Brooks, RN, DNSc, FAAN, senior director and director of nursing at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester, New York.

Brooks, along with colleague Toni Smith, RN, EdD, Program Director for Nursing Practice and Support Services at the University of Rochester Medical Center, concluded that the curriculum prepared students to assume leadership roles in community health care organizations. They said that the curriculum now meets standards similar to those for nursing programs in the United States. Smith also noted that the 49 graduates of the fourth-year course will be expected to plan and actively participate in influencing and advocating for improvements in

patient care and health care reform in Kazakhstan. The critical aspect of the new nurse manager's role, noted Smith, is how the nurse will ultimately work with the physician.

The Kazak Ministry of Health applauded the work of the Almaty Medical College in developing the fourth-year program for nurses. "Increasing the role of nursing is an important step in the further development of our overall health care reforms," said Kazak Deputy Minister of Health Maksut Kulzhanov during a press conference with AIHA.