

In Class or On the Internet, Romanian Partners Explore New Territory

By Julia Ross

Whether they are teaching graduate students in Bucharest or treating factory workers in Cluj, Romanian health care practitioners, educators and students are struggling to adapt to rapid health systems reform while opening new avenues for professional development. Over the last two years, AIHA's health management education (HME) and hospital partnerships in Romania have facilitated this process by arming health care professionals with an array of new clinical, managerial and technological skills.

Through its professional exchanges, the HME partnership linking the University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Carol Davila," and the Institute of Health Services Management in Bucharest with the University of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois, focuses on improving health management teaching materials and increasing expertise in health management and policy. Partners have studied the uses and development of case studies for health management education through an intensive series of workshops, and have completed three Romania-specific case studies for use in the classroom. This May the partnership will host a workshop to disseminate their experience in case study development to representatives of AIHA's four other HME partnerships in CEE.

"We have participated in some extraordinary new outreach activities to the policy and health management communities in Romania," said Edward Lawlor, PhD, partnership coordinator and associate professor at the University of Chicago. "Colleagues we have worked with include ministry officials, legislators, academicians, and practicing health managers. Partners have successfully completed the case studies and other health management curricular materials that allow active engagement of the health reform issues facing Romania."

Though a second Romanian partnership--between the Clinic for Occupational Diseases, the Institute of Public Health and the Inspectorate of Public Health in Cluj, and Thomas Jefferson University (TJU) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania--graduated last September, partners continue to pursue information technology and nursing activities. For example, last fall TJU's Jefferson Occupational and Environmental Medicine Program, assisted by partners in Cluj, launched a new web site (<http://jeffline.tju.edu/CWIS/DEPT/OEM/JOEMP/>) featuring two instructional modules: one providing information on medical surveillance and one on medical informatics.

The medical surveillance module outlines a step-by-step process for conducting surveillance in the workplace, reporting and analyzing the resulting data, and developing protocols on asbestos and lead exposure. The medical informatics module offers tutorials on evidence-based medicine and MEDLINE, and features two case studies illustrating how to perform on-line searches to help diagnose and treat patients with lead poisoning and respiratory distress. Visitors to the site will also find links to more than 90 international and government agencies, journals, listservs, clinical practice guidelines and professional associations related to environmental and occupational health.

Horatiu Bocsa, information coordinator at the Clinic for Occupational Diseases, said access to the Internet and other technologies has enabled partners in Cluj to feel a part of the global medical community.

"Before this partnership began, a lot of people from my hospital, and from the medical profession in general, had very poor abilities in informatics issues. Nobody from the hospital knew what the Internet really meant or had any notion of it," he said. "Now we have established a lot of contacts using the Internet ... anybody from anywhere in the world who

wants to search for something regarding occupational medicine is able to reach our [web] pages. Now we really are a name in the world."

The Cluj-Philadelphia partnership also hosted a ten-day nursing management workshop in March in Tihuta, Romania. Twenty-five nurses from Cluj joined four nurses from Moldova to learn about topics such as leadership and team-building, and quality and financial management.