

National Information Learning Center Opens in Georgia

By Zviad Kirtava, MD, PhD, and Carol Burns, MLS

December's opening of the National Information Learning Center (NILC) in Tbilisi, Georgia represents years of hard work on the part of the Tbilisi-Atlanta, Georgia partners, who saw improved access to biomedical information as integral to the partnership's success.

The center, which is supported by the Georgian Ministry of Health, was created to meet the information needs of the health communities in Tbilisi and throughout Georgia. It will provide health care professionals with Internet access to MEDLINE and other biomedical databases, multimedia medical educational programs, e-mail access, and access to a basic collection of print, CD-ROM and multimedia resources. Internet training will also be provided, and we hope to establish two computer networks connecting local health care institutions and libraries.

The NILC has a direct connection to an Internet provider in Tbilisi, and will distribute biomedical information to different learning resource centers in health care institutions throughout Georgia. In addition to the local area network that connects NILC computers and other users within our building--the Tbilisi-Atlanta partnership office, the National Health Management Center, the Emergency Medical Service Training Center and the Nursing Association office--we expect to have some remote users who will be connected to the center via modem. Tbilisi State Medical University and City Hospital No. 2 will be the first connected. We would like to expand these remote connections to other regional health care institutions, but this will require improvements in the quality and reliability of Georgia's telecommunications system, such as those starting to be made in the cities of Tbilisi and Kutaisi.

Establishing the NILC was a truly collaborative process between the US and Georgia partners, with funding from the Ministry of Health of Georgia, and we are proud that this cooperation has resulted in additional funding for the center from the Soros Foundation and the Emory Medical Care Foundation.

On December 17, Georgia President Eduard Shevardnadze, Minister of Health Avtandil Jorbenadze, Tbilisi Mayor Badri Shoshitaishvili and US Ambassador William Courtney joined Tbilisi-Atlanta partners in inaugurating the NILC.

"The Georgian health care system is experiencing the difficult and interesting process of reformation....We very much hope that the National Information Learning Center will make a significant contribution to the development of the health sector in Georgia," Jorbenadze said at the opening ceremony.

When we envision the future, we think of our children who have benefited from the humanitarian aid provided by the partnership. As our children grow, they will learn advanced information technologies more readily than the older generation. They will fulfill our dream of living in a better world...a world in which the creative and productive talents of our citizens can be realized.

Zviad Kirtava is the director of the National Information Learning Center in Tbilisi, Georgia and Carol Burns is director of the Health Science Center Library at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.