

Changing the Face of Nursing in Armenia

By Joanne Neuber

Whether the topic was nursing education or management training, one common thread was woven through the Second Annual Armenian Nursing Association Conference: the desire for change in the nursing profession.

More than 200 nurses gathered at the Erebuni Medical Center in Yerevan, Armenia in June for the three-day conference. Most of the nurses were from Armenia, but representatives from each NIS partnership attended. Joined by senior Armenian health care and government representatives, they discussed the challenges of their profession and cited numerous successful reforms implemented in their partnerships.

During the conference's opening session, Armenian First Lady Ludmilla Ter-Petrosian congratulated nurses for promoting reforms. Reflecting on her own experience as a nurse practitioner in Leningrad in the 1960s, Ter-Petrosian reminded her fellow nurses of past difficulties, including limited medical training and restrictive job responsibilities.

"Our past is our common source of strength, serving to remind us of the obstacles we are overcoming in promoting change in the nursing profession," she said.

Ter-Petrosian cited the formation of the 3,000-member Armenian Nursing Association last year as an example of positive change. Another example is the current effort to expand Erebuni's four-year nursing curriculum to six other schools in Armenia, she said.

Dmitri Dushanuyan, first deputy minister of health for Armenia, told participants that his country "is committed to upgrading nurse training and education, and to supporting the continued work of the nursing association."

To reinforce this commitment to education, two partnership Nursing Resource Centers at the Erebuni Nursing School and the Emergency Scientific Medical Center in Yerevan opened at the conference's conclusion. The centers "serve as important models for continuous nursing education," said Sharon Weinstein, RN, AIHA partner coordinator and director of the office of international affairs at Premier, Inc. in Chicago. "Our learning process does not end when we receive our diplomas, but continues on in our work life. And as nurse leaders, we must continually look toward where we need to go, despite the challenges we may face, and define the changes we wish to implement," she said.

These changes were addressed during the remainder of the conference, during which nurses divided into groups to discuss ways to improve nursing communication, management and education programs in their home institutions. Topics also included women's health issues and hospital-based infection control standards.

During a breakout session on nursing management, Rosanna Ginosian, RN, chief nurse at Emergency Scientific Medical Center, told participants how she lobbied for improved nursing clinical training at her hospital and noted nursing's expanded role in preliminary physical assessments, advanced patient diagnoses and treatment--functions previously performed only by physicians. Ginosian conducts regular staff meetings to talk about the need for change and recently helped promote the use of a standardized, hospital-based infection control program among her staff.

In another session, Nouné Hagopian, RN, nurse educator at Erebuni Nursing College, explained the array of courses offered at her school. The program promotes continuous postgraduate training and encourages nurses to take on leadership roles. It also trains

students to conduct patient assessments utilizing nursing care plans, a standardized set of protocols that describe the nurse's role in more than 130 diagnoses.

At the conclusion of each workshop, participants discussed changes they could implement in their health care facilities. Nurses identified the need to communicate among staff, choose leaders, develop nursing standards and expand nursing education programs.

For many of the participants, the conference was their first opportunity to discuss the nursing profession outside of their hospitals. For Aida Margarian, head nurse of Polyclinic No. 11 in Yerevan, topics on nursing management were important. "Teamwork is the key to reforms," she said, adding that the conference offered "many useful educational tools," including a nursing standards manual, which was provided to each participant for use in their hospitals. Participants also received association membership cards and pins to encourage their ongoing participation in future meetings.