

## Croatian Partnerships Help Rebuild Post-War Health Care

*By Julia Ross*

Croatian physicians and nurses who stayed on the job throughout the war in the former Yugoslavia often worked in hospitals damaged by shelling, with no light, water or heat. Since the conflict ended, however, the country's health care sector has begun a steady recovery, and two AIHA hospital partnerships have stepped in to help rebuild and expand health care delivery to a population on the mend.

In Zagreb, three health care institutions--Sveti Duh General Hospital, University Hospital for Infectious Diseases and Children's Hospital for Respiratory Diseases--have been collaborating for two-and-a-half years with Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (DHMC) in Lebanon, New Hampshire to improve care in clinical areas such as infection control, children's asthma and tuberculosis, renal disease, critical care medicine and obstetrics and gynecology. Partners also have focused on developing more advanced nursing, management and leadership skills.

"I think what is truly unique about our partnership lies in challenging how we think about our work," said partnership representative Jo Ann Kairys, director of marketing at DHMC. "We have begun to see measurable impact in many areas, such as more efficient and less costly methods of pharmacy management. But the long-term legacy will be that the Zagreb partners develop capacity to change work processes, and build effective, self-directed teams that are patient-focused, family-centered, and knowledgeable about balancing cost and quality ... and sharing results of their efforts with colleagues throughout the country."

Zagreb-Lebanon partners began a new initiative last winter on collaborative practice between physicians and nurses, and the Children's Hospital for Respiratory Diseases continues to make strides toward becoming a national referral center for asthma and tuberculosis. Additionally, the partnership will host its second national conference on infection control, an inaugural conference on asthma and tuberculosis, and a national nursing conference in Zagreb later this year.

Zadar General Hospital and the Orthopedic Hospital of Biograd, located near the coastal city of Zadar, comprise AIHA's second Croatian partnership, along with the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Health System, Inc., which has hospitals in five US states. This partnership, established in November 1995, has been very active in enhancing health care delivery in oncology, orthopedics, cardiovascular disease, trauma, geriatrics, nursing and infection control, and has promoted total quality management and fundraising skills.

Among the partnership's many achievements in these nine target areas are the development of in-hospital and community educational programs for cardiovascular disease (see article, page 18) and cancer prevention; implementation of screening protocols for post-traumatic stress disorder; improved treatment for osteomyelitis (bone infection arising from war injuries); and establishment of a board of directors for a Children and Family Foundation that will raise money for medical expenses of Croatian war victims.

The oncology initiative has focused on improving early detection and prevention of cancer, providing educational tools for patients and physicians, and developing a computerized tracking system to record and analyze cancer diagnoses and treatment outcomes. Through partnership donations, Zadar General has received a mammography unit, oncology textbooks and educational models for teaching physicians how to perform prostate, rectal and breast exams.

"The legacy we hope for is for [Croatian] family practice physicians to include cancer prevention and early treatment as part of the routine patient care provided, and that cancer data is collected and trended to give their physicians an ability to better care for the specific

needs of the Croatian population," said partnership oncology team leader Marie Droege, executive vice president of operations and planning at Our Lady of Bellefonte Hospital in Ashland, Kentucky.

US physicians and nurses continue to learn from their Croatian partners as well. As Bill Munley, administrator of rehabilitation at St. Francis Hospital in Greenville, South Carolina, remarked after a recent orthopedics trip to Zadar: "The American team had the experience of a lifetime in seeing firsthand how the best possible patient outcomes are achieved under difficult environmental and financial conditions."