

## HME Partners Convene International Health Policy Seminar

*By Charles Brecher, PhD*

Last October, more than 40 faculty representing AIHA's five health management education (HME) partnerships in Central and Eastern Europe gathered in Prague, Czech Republic to explore a variety of topics related to health care policy and reform. This AIHA health policy seminar gave partners an opportunity for inter-partnership interaction and resulted in the formation of a network to exchange information on health care reform advances in the region. The seminar was held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER), which also focused on the theme of European health care reform.

The AIHA seminar arose from common interests expressed in discussions held at the 1997 CEE Partnership Meeting in Zagreb, Croatia. At that meeting, topics identified for further discussion were: the role of policy analysis skills in HME curricula, the need for more comparative studies and course materials in HME programs, and the role HME faculty could play in monitoring national health care reforms in CEE.

Participants at the health policy seminar benefited from presentations by outside experts. Professor Richard Southby of George Washington University in Washington, DC reviewed the approaches taken by several universities in the United States in teaching about comparative health systems and identified teaching materials available on the subject for participants to use in their own curricula. Professor Robert Bradbury of Clark University discussed approaches to teaching policy analysis skills and the ways in which it can be linked to issues in the strategic management of health care institutions.

Ben Chu, an associate dean at New York University and a former New York City Health Commissioner, examined a case study of how policy analysis was used in combating a tuberculosis epidemic in New York. The presentation helped partners understand how analytic techniques can be useful--even in a highly politicized setting.

The potential role of HME faculty in monitoring, and helping distill lessons from, health care reform efforts in CEE countries stimulated lively discussion. Josep Figueras, Regional Adviser for Health Systems Analysis at the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, attended the seminar and described WHO's efforts to track reform developments across the world, including a series of "Health Systems in Transition" profiles, which WHO has published for over 30 countries in the region and plans to update every two years.

The AIHA partners agreed that they could supplement WHO's work by utilizing the network established through the partnership program to provide frequent exchange of information and dissemination of important developments in health care reform throughout the region. Such a network could also develop more detailed case studies of specific pilot projects and other initiatives. To that end the partners agreed to establish a clearinghouse for information on health care reforms at the University of Matej Bel in Banska Bystrica, Slovakia, a partner institution in the Slovakia-Scranton, Pennsylvania partnership. Partners will submit information on country-specific reform issues, which will then be disseminated to all members of the network. Through this effort, the partners hope to provide relevant information on comparative health care reform for policymakers throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

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