

Partnership Works

Tbilisi-Atlanta

A team from Emory University's Program Against Micronutrient Malnutrition (PAMM) and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia traveled to the Georgia Republic to assist the Georgian Ministry of Health with development of the nation's plan to eliminate iodine deficiency. Iodine deficiency can cause mental impairment and thyroid problems. Better coordination among agencies working to iodize salt, implementation of regulations mandating iodization, and development of an analysis of salt importation and distribution in Georgia are essential to curtailing a growing deficiency of iodine consumption, said David DeLozier, MPH, a research fellow with CDC.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent civil war in Georgia, the centralized iodization system broke down, and a program of diagnosis and monitoring of iodine deficiency was discontinued. Since then, researchers from CDC and PAMM have discovered that iodine deficiency affects all areas of Georgia. Regional surveys indicated goiters in 50 to 70 percent of the children and low levels of urinary iodine. Using the World Health Organization's classification system, the team concluded Georgia's problem is severe.

While in Georgia in April, the team met with Minister of Health Avtandil Jorbenadze and micronutrient experts in the ministry as well as with central and regional endocrinology groups responsible for implementing iodization programs, and members of Parliament. The Parliament is responsible for implementing a presidential decree from last year mandating salt iodization. However, Parliament members are reluctant to move ahead with iodization because they are concerned about excess iodine consumption resulting in hyperthyroidism and the effect on home and small business production of some products, such as cheese, requiring non-iodized salt, according to DeLozier.

Atlanta and Tbilisi partners also visited the towns of Gori and Batumi, near the Turkish border, to examine schoolchildren, meet with salt distributors and border customs agents, and hold press conferences to help publicize the importance of iodine in the diet. Tbilisi partners are now working for approval of salt iodization legislation and to analyze salt distribution patterns.

Tuzla-Buffalo

Bosnian patients with cardiovascular disease will now have access to a full complement of cardiac diagnostic procedures at a new cardiac catheterization lab, opened at the University Clinical Center of Tuzla this summer. Partners from Buffalo General Health System in Buffalo, New York helped develop the lab, assisting with obtaining funding for a fully reconditioned cardiac angio unit, and providing clinical training to many of the clinical center's diagnostic cardiologists. The lab is the first of its kind in Bosnia, noted US partnership coordinator C.J. Urlaub.

A July 24 ceremony marking the opening was attended by Ibrahim Ramic, MD, Deputy Minister of Health for Bosnia; Tuzla Mayor Selim Beslagic; the governor and health minister for Tuzla canton; and partnership representatives from Tuzla and Buffalo. Physicians from Buffalo also gave a scientific lecture on cardiology as part of the opening day events.

Bucharest-Chicago

Partners at the Institute of Health Services Management in Bucharest, Romania and the University of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois collaborated this summer to teach a health management course to newly-appointed district health directors in Romania. The July 15-19

course, convened at the request of Romanian Minister of Health Stefan Dragulescu, covered topics such as quality measurement, needs assessment in hospitals and community settings, cost-benefit analysis and conflict management and negotiation.

Group exercises required participants to use health statistics from the eight districts of Romania to solve health management problems. "The exercises offered participants the chance to check their understanding of health management concepts and to develop skills for practical use of theoretical knowledge," said Silvia Florescu, a public health specialist at the Institute of Health Services Management and a course facilitator.

"The district officers seemed most interested in learning about how to allocate resources for hospitals," added Kristi Raube, PhD, an assistant professor at the University of Chicago. "They were very knowledgeable about data and indicators of health status for hospitals, but were less experienced at applying these data to the planning process. They were also less familiar with outreach strategies, as well as the delivery of ambulatory care services."

The 40 district health directors who took part in the course were recently appointed to their positions as part of Romania's new government; they are responsible for carrying out the Ministry of Health's reform efforts nationwide.

"Considering the changes that the Romanian health system is undergoing, the important position of the [course] participants in the wheels of the health system, and their mission to change the process, we can conclude that this course was an intimate and essential link to the unfolding of health care reform," said Florescu.

"We were all very impressed with the officers and their willingness to learn new approaches," said Raube of her Romanian students. "They will have a challenging year as they implement health reform in Romania, but I believe their enthusiasm will help them achieve their goals."

Bishkek-Kansas City

AIHA partners in Kansas City, Kansas donated more than \$600,000 in medical equipment and supplies to hospitals in Bishkek and Osh, Kyrgyzstan in August. The shipment was part of the US Department of State/Defense humanitarian aid project Operation Provide Hope and included air splints, bandages and stretchers. The medical supplies will be used by emergency first responders at the Osh Oblast Hospital and the Fourth Trauma Hospital in Bishkek, the region's only trauma hospitals for severe burns.

The donation was packaged by community volunteers, including staff from the Kansas City Fire Department. Firefighters from Kansas City have been working with burn specialists from the University of Kansas Medical Center to promote fire prevention guidelines for Kyrgyz partners.

Kansas partners will conduct workshops in October for Kyrgyz partners and affiliated health care facilities on methods to prevent infections following severe burns. University of Kansas partners donated 100 translated copies of Burn Care Treatment and Rehabilitation for participants. The handbook offers nurses, physicians, therapists and first-responders advanced guidelines for burn care. In addition, Kyrgyz partners are renovating burn care facilities to include handwashing, drying and disinfectant facilities.

"Burn care is a team effort involving physician training on skin grafting, nurse and therapist training on infection prevention and rehabilitation. It needs all these people to succeed," said Louise Redford, US coordinator for the Bishkek-Kansas City partnership.

Dushanbe-Boulder

Partners in Boulder, Colorado donated over \$52,000 in medical equipment and supplies to their hospital partners in Dushanbe, Tajikistan in September. The shipment was part of the US Department of State/Defense humanitarian aid project "Operation Provide Hope" and included exam tables, lights, syringes and supplies for use at City Medical Center.

Mike Soleta, biomedical engineer, Boulder Community Hospital, helped install the equipment this fall.

"Switching to modern, western technology can pose numerous challenges," Soleta said, "especially when operating under a different system." Unlike the US health system, which encourages a team approach in equipment training and use, the traditional health system employed in Tajik hospitals allows for little nurse training on the equipment. Dushanbe-Boulder partners are addressing these differences as part of their training on the donated equipment this fall.

Semipalatinsk-Houston

Semipalatinsk-Houston partners hosted an international cancer registry conference at the Semipalatinsk Medical Academy in Kazakstan in July. Titled "Experience in Development of a Cancer Registry in the City of Semipalatinsk," the two-day conference gave partners an opportunity to share information with more than 60 medical professionals from the region on the cancer registry software program being developed by partners at the Baylor College of Medicine Center for Cancer Control Research in Houston, Texas. Conference participants included representatives from the Kazak Ministry of Health and from oncological centers in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Pavlodar and Semipalatinsk, Kazakstan and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Houston partners are developing an "innovative" Russian-English computer software program to "show the reality of the [health] situation in the region," said Sara Rozin, US coordinator for the Semipalatinsk-Houston partnership. Health care practitioners are particularly concerned about monitoring cancer in the region because more than 500 nuclear tests took place at the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site between 1949 and 1989.

More than 400 cancer cases from the Semipalatinsk region have been abstracted so far by partners and will be entered into the computer program upon its completion. Houston partners hope to train medical professionals in Ust-Kamenogorsk and Pavlodar on the software program later this year.

Cluj-Philadelphia

Environmental and occupational health professionals in the industrial city of Cluj, Romania, hosted their US colleagues from Philadelphia's Thomas Jefferson University in September at a week-long symposium on occupational health issues. Topics addressed during the conference included: heavy metals toxicity, medical surveillance and informatics, and hazard pay for factory workers.

Partners have focused on changing Romania's national hazard pay law, which increases the salaries of workers when they are exposed to hazardous substances on the job. "Hazard pay represents a particularly perverse incentive for occupational health and safety," said US partnership coordinator Lance Simpson, PhD, MD. "Workers and unions may be motivated to sacrifice their health and safety for immediate economic gain."