

Health Management Education in Central Asia

BY DENISE E. HOLMES

What will health management education (HME) in Central Asia look like in the year 2010? If you ask the rector of the Kazakstan School of Public Health (KSPH), Maksut Kulzhanov, MD, PhD, he will tell you to take a closer look at his own institution today, for Dr. Kulzhanov and his colleagues deem KSPH a future leader in



Maksut Kulzhanov, rector of the Kazakstan School of Public Health.

health management education in Central Asia. As he explained during a recent study tour for new HME partners (see *Connections*, www.aiha.com, June 1999), KSPH leadership envisions the school at the forefront of the field, providing instruction to students not only from other countries in Central Asia, but throughout the NIS and beyond.

The Founding of KSPH

KSPH is an institution long anticipated, one whose educational foci were painstakingly planned over several years

by a committee of founders. With the assistance of the Kazakstan Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe, the committee worked tirelessly to set out operational parameters for KSPH. The planning process began with an initial assessment in early 1995 and benefited from the input of an array of national, regional, and international experts in health. Dr. Kulzhanov, a former Deputy Minister of Health for Kazakstan, was named the first rector in 1997.

A Progressive Definition of Health

Importantly, KSPH uses the “new” broad definition of public health, advocated by WHO, that encompasses not only traditional hygiene concerns, but also ecology, environmental health, health promotion, intersectoral approaches, and health services management. This is of particular significance given that Kazakstan, like other NIS countries, faces serious, broad-based challenges in the health sector. The new KSPH evolved amidst fragile public health and primary care systems, declining health status, underfunding of healthcare services and pharmaceuticals, and inefficient use of existing human resources and facilities.

The School was established with three main objectives

1. to train the public health workforce of Kazakstan and neighboring countries;
2. to undertake research activities (both basic and applied, and interdisciplinary to the extent possible); and
3. to offer expert consultancy services to health authorities and health profes-

sionals at all levels in the country, as well as to other health-related sectors. One of its founding principles is to unify public health and health services management, given the traditional split between the two fields.

Programs of Study

From the first course offering, KSPH has attracted widespread interest, and its enrollment has increased steadily. In early 1999, the school began to offer a six-week executive management program for current administrators, beginning with a series of six specialized training courses that lead to a certificate. The program is designed for policy makers, practitioners, and managers working to implement health reform, and is offered in

- public health,
- policy and administration,
- health services management,
- financial management,
- health promotion and disease prevention, and
- environmental health/communicable disease.

KSPH anticipates that approximately 500–550 people each year will benefit from these short courses. In addition, KSPH offers 1-, 2-, and 3-week executive management courses.

The core modules of these short-term programs will form the basis for two degree programs to be phased in sequentially. First, KSPH will offer the Master of Science (MSc) to health and other professionals with a minimum of two years experience in health or human services. The seven MSc program areas are

- public health,
- health policy and administration,
- health services management,
- health promotion,
- environmental health,
- health finance and economics, and
- epidemiology.



Photo: Denise Holmes.

Kulzhanov and colleagues from Armenia, Georgia, Kazakstan, and the Kyrgyz Republic visited successful AIHA-supported HME partnerships in CEE in April.

Later, KSPH plans to offer a doctorate in each of four departments

- health policy and management,
- ecology, environment and health, hygiene and occupational health,
- health promotion and social sciences and communication, and
- epidemiology, biostatistics and demography.

It is anticipated that 20 students per year will receive their PhD; program development is scheduled to begin in 2001, with a possible start date of 2002 or 2003. Building on these core modules, over 10–15 years KSPH will gradually develop a program that offers a full array of MSc and PhD options.

Beyond the Kazak Border

KSPH's future includes reaching beyond Almaty and the borders of Kazakstan to encompass a wider region. As Dr. Kulzhanov develops a strategic plan for his institution, he foresees establishing a branch of KSPH in Kazakstan's new, more centrally located capital, Astana. In addition, the school has begun pilot projects with other organizations in Kazakstan, has conducted outreach courses in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, and plans to offer similar courses in the future. At a recent regional conference, representatives

from Azerbaijan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan signed an agreement with KSPH whereby the school will train one or two students from these countries each year, with each country providing financial support.

Dr. Kulzhanov is not alone in his vision for KSPH's future. The Kazakstan Ministry of

Health also views the school as a lead institution, not only for Kazakstan, but for the entire Central Asia region, and WHO's Regional Office for Europe has been an important—and vocal—advocate of KSPH since its inception. Dr. B. Serdar Savas, former regional adviser for health care policies and systems, and now director of programme management, WHO Regional Office for Europe, served on the KSPH planning committee and remains a strategic adviser and partner.

Refining Partnership Goals

In the summer of 1999, KSPH launched its HME partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), based in Richmond, Virginia. In addition to the countless resources that VCU brings to the table, including its highly regarded schools of medicine, public health, and allied health, VCU also bears the distinction of having been active among the first successful set of AIHA HME partnerships in Central and Eastern Europe.

In anticipation of this new partnership, during the April 1999 HME study tour, Dr. Kulzhanov and other representatives of the new NIS HME partnerships met with CEE partners in Romania, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. There they learned about the progress and accom-

plishments of CEE partner institutions in health professions education (particularly management education) and health services research. Based on these visits, Dr. Kulzhanov refined some near-term goals and objectives for KSPH in the course of its AIHA partnership with VCU. For example, he now plans to establish a new regional journal that will focus on health management education and practice, and which will be developed, produced, and distributed in conjunction with the Kyrgyz State Medical Academy in Bishkek (also the site of a new AIHA partnership with HME activity). In addition, Dr. Kulzhanov seeks supplementary strategic alliances with academic institutions in the CEE.

KSPH's ambitious goals and objectives for the partnership include

- developing state-of-the-art teaching methods;
- fostering faculty development;
- conducting courses jointly with the US partners;
- establishing a national center for health policy and information;
- establishing a branch of KSPH in Astana;
- creating a regional association of managers and public health professionals; and
- offering information and technology support.

One early partnership activity will be the review and possible revision of the curriculum.

Health management education has largely developed as a US-driven and dominated field. By 2010, Dr. Maksut Kulzhanov and his colleagues at the Kazakstan School of Public Health hope to make their institution an important locus of health management education in Central Asia.

Denise E. Holmes, JD, MPH, is the principle AIHA technical resource for Health Management Education.