

Developing Case Studies: Partners Adapt a Teaching Methodology to Meet Their Needs

BY RACHEL ONG

One of the most critical needs facing health education institutions in the NIS today is culturally appropriate and country-specific teaching materials. Although faculty members in the United States often integrate case

meet the needs of their students, this summer nearly 30 representatives from the four Health Management Education (HME) partnerships in Central Asia and the Caucasus attended a week-long workshop on the case method, held at the Kazakhstan School of Public Health (KSPH) in Almaty. Through a series of group and individual activities—facilitated by faculty members and partners from the United States and Central and Eastern Europe—workshop participants developed their own cases. Maksut Kulzhanov, rector of KSPH, emphasized the progressive nature of the workshop by noting that this “is the first seminar solely devoted to the case study, a very important teaching method that is seldom used in Kazakhstan [or any other NIS country].”

The goal of the workshop was to enhance faculty development by helping instructors to build practical case studies specific to their home country that can be used to teach students about management and administration in a hospital or other healthcare delivery setting. During the first part of the workshop, faculty pre-

sentations were devoted to an overview of the case method as a pedagogical tool and its benefits vis-à-vis other adult teaching methods. Mary Scarie, USAID representative to Kazakhstan, supported the benefits of this concept by stressing that “although there are many ways to learn, the case method is natural.” Bogdan Pana and Roman Prymula, faculty members from AIHA’s graduated Bucharest (Romania)/Chicago and Bohemia (Czech Republic)/Las Vegas partnerships, respectively, proved this point when they presented two of their own cases as examples. The presentations allowed participants not only to critique two exemplary cases, but, equally important, to interact as students as well. Other introductory topics focused on the overall value of the case method and an appraisal of the critical elements of a good case: an engaging problem, detailed realism, and an insider’s perspective.

In the following days, participants developed their own case studies, first working in small groups and then individually. Workshop faculty met with participants as a group at each stage of development as well as extensively in one-on-one consultations. Several participants noted that these individual consultations were especially helpful, giving them a clear idea of how to implement the basic concepts presented during the large group sessions. Throughout the week, faculty introduced additional and deeper elements of the case method, such as teaching notes and how to refine cases over years of teaching. Nailya Almagambetova, head of the Department of International Relations at KSPH, commented, “Previously there was no information how to consistently use the case method; each used it according to his own understanding. Now, after this workshop, we have a systematic approach. This is already a type of collaboration among our faculty.”



Photo: Rachel Ong

Partners discuss case studies during a group exercise.

studies into their various teaching methodologies, this particular instructional tool is relatively new in the NIS. In an effort to learn more about how case studies can be used in the classroom and how to develop specific case studies to

The newly developed case studies covered a wide range of topics, from smoking cessation strategies to the complexities of privatizing health services and budgetary problems facing polyclinics. One case, presented by Agassi Petrosyan, faculty member at the National Institute of Health in Yerevan, addressed a problem facing Armenia today: the question of licensure of practitioners of non-traditional medicine. To teach the case, Petrosyan used a role-play exercise, placing students in the positions of minister of health, doctor, alternative medicine provider, and patient. Through the role play,

his fellow participants explored the complexities of the situation facing the current healthcare system by evaluating both the effectiveness of alternative medicine and the level of medical knowledge of alternative medicine providers. At the end of the role play, the “commission”—the other participants—was asked to present a decision regarding the licensure of alternative medicine providers.

Olesya Zamulina, instructor at Kyrgyz State Medical Academy, developed a case that addresses a situation facing many clinics today as healthcare institutions move from public to private ownership. Zamulina’s case highlighted how internal and external pressures affect services and access within the clinic—especially the tension between the new owner of the healthcare institution and its personnel—which in turn creates a tension between compensation and profit. Solutions and opinions from the discussants varied widely, depending on whether their view-

point was that of a manager, owner, or doctor, as well as because of their personal beliefs. Not surprisingly, there was hesitancy on the part of physicians to give up their job. One strategy offered by the group was to defend their positions by

decrease in patient volume, while at the same time maintaining the same staff level as before privatization. This highly challenging and analytical case focused on proactive approaches to overcoming the situation through personnel changes, mar-

keting tactics used by the clinic management to potentially increase funds, organizational or structural change, and even the development of a business plan to increase the utilization of the building or personnel somehow. Gerzmava is director of the National Health Management Center in Tbilisi, Georgia, and his complex case offered



(l-r) Kural Kurakbaev, Lena Nanushyan, Saltanet Nasdiran, Kenesh Djusopov, and Otar Gerzmava review case studies during a workshop breakout session.

Photo: Rachel Ong.

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forming a medical association or an organization with an informal leader who would advocate the physicians’ concerns to the owner of the clinic.

Similar themes were echoed in Otar Gerzmava’s case, in which a recently privatized polyclinic is facing a six-fold

a wide range of potential solutions.

At the close of the conference, all participants presented their case studies to small groups, with each member completing peer evaluations of the cases presented in their group. The four most highly ranked cases were then presented to the entire group, followed by substantial commentary from both the faculty and participants. Although this type of peer evaluation and discussion was a new experience for most participants, they found it to be a useful process because it supported a clear, systematic approach to evaluation. Through collaboration with the workshop faculty and each other, participants left Almaty with a clear understanding of how to develop and teach cases in their home institutions and how case methodology compares with other methodologies traditionally used in teaching.

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