

## A Note from the Executive Director

When a typhoid epidemic struck Dushanbe, Tajikistan last winter, patients began flooding into City Medical Center, quickly overflowing the hospital's 565 beds. At the height of the epidemic, 2,000 patients were squeezed into the facility. Partners from Boulder, Colorado, on a month-long trip to the hospital, worked side by side with medical center staff to treat patients, who became sick after Dushanbe's main water utility ran out of chlorine and bacteria contaminated the water.

Dushanbe's experience illustrates the growing threat many NIS and CEE nations face from infectious diseases. As newer infectious diseases, such as AIDS, emerge in the region and as older ones, like tuberculosis and syphilis, gain ground, health systems that are already facing health reform pressures will have additional challenges in preventing and treating these diseases.

In addition to the typhoid epidemic, partners are confronting other new dangers posed by infectious disease: The Woman and Child Clinic at Savior's Hospital in Moscow, Russia has seen a sharp increase in chlamydia and herpes among teens. Partners at Republic Children's Hospital in Riga, Latvia have confronted drug-resistant strains of salmonella and are exploring new treatments. At Faculty Hospital in Kosice, Slovakia, a re-examination of antibiotic use has lowered both the infection rate and costs in the neonatal intensive care unit.

This issue of CommonHealth looks at both the threats from infectious disease and the strides that partners are making to curb emerging problems in this field. To assist partners in conquering these diseases, AIHA is providing training for microbiologists on using the World Health Organization's antibiotic resistance tracking software, WHONET, and is helping partners upgrade microbiology laboratories in NIS hospitals. Also, one of the themes of the Fifth Annual Partnership Conference for the NIS, held October 6-8 in Atlanta, Georgia and jointly sponsored with the US Department of Health and Human Services, will be infectious disease. With assistance from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, conference and pre-conference sessions will focus on a range of related topics--from infection control in hospitals to preventing exposure of health care workers.

The conference will also highlight chronic diseases, such as diabetes and asthma, in which partners have had a great impact, both in preventing and in assisting patients to take part in the management of their diseases. To help put both chronic and infectious diseases in the context of broader health system reform, conference sessions will look at the state of the health care delivery system in the NIS.

Although the path to slowing the rate of infectious diseases may be daunting, partners are proving themselves to be effective champions in treating not just individual epidemics, but in changing health care systems so they can effectively prevent future outbreaks. Increased vigilance in infection control in hospitals, inoculations for both health care workers and the general population against such diseases as hepatitis B and diphtheria, and more careful monitoring of antibiotic resistance are important steps toward ensuring a healthier future for everyone.