

A Note From the Executive Director

With this issue of CommonHealth, AIHA marks the beginning of a new, five-year cooperative agreement with the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and a new generation of health care partnerships in the New Independent States (NIS) and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). As these partnerships begin to take shape in coming months, many will focus on strengthening primary care as the most direct and cost-effective way to address underlying causes of morbidity and mortality in the region.

This issue of CommonHealth begins to establish a framework for understanding how partnerships can contribute to the improvement of primary care. The lead articles provide an overview of how primary care is practiced in the US and across the NIS, revealing common challenges and successes arising out of the current transition away from specialized, individual-oriented, curative care.

Neal Vanselow, MD, who served as chairman of the US Institute of Medicine's Committee on the Future of Primary Care, describes a primary care "renaissance" in the US that emphasizes health promotion and disease prevention, while Zoya Shabarova, AIHA's deputy regional director for programs in West NIS, discusses the legacy of Soviet marginalization of primary care through overspecialization and increased numbers of physicians and hospital beds.

A report on a recent AIHA Primary Care Advisory Committee meeting suggests the common ground that future partnerships are likely to share as they address a reorientation toward primary care. The committee concluded that future partnerships can play an especially vital role in the transformation of human resources through the development of practical training and re-training programs to support this new orientation and improve quality of care.

Also included in this issue of CommonHealth is a four-page, pull-out section that describes the partnership program's mission and its achievements over the past six years. This section is designed for readers who want to know more about AIHA and its partners and may be interested in replicating successful programs in their own communities or participating in future program opportunities.

As we develop a new generation of partnerships, we welcome the participation of health care professionals and communities able to commit the time and expertise necessary to developing sustainable solutions to health care problems in newly democratic nations. The partnership program continues to demonstrate that we have much to learn from each other as we collaboratively explore new avenues for improving health in our communities and our nations.