

## Mtskheta Nurse Helps Patients Manage Hypertension

**N**ino Revazishvili is a great teacher. Her warm personality makes it easy for her to connect with people. They listen to her and most of them take her advice to heart. That's a good thing. After all, the information Revazishvili shares with her patients at the Mtskheta Family Medicine Center is about how they can stave off cardiovascular disease by controlling their blood pressure and adopting healthier lifestyle choices.

"Hypertension is a huge problem in Mtskheta and other districts in this region of Georgia," Revazishvili admits, noting that roughly six out of every 10 adult patients who come to the Center have high blood pressure. "Life is stressful and many people don't take care of themselves. Perhaps they smoke or eat fatty foods ... maybe they drink too much or don't get enough physical activity," she points out, explaining that community assessment surveys conducted soon after the partnership was formed painted a clear picture of just how pervasive the problem was.

Through the partnership, Revazishvili and other practitioners from Mtskheta traveled to Milwaukee where they saw effective primary care programs in action—including some for managing hypertension. "I participated in three exchanges and each one introduced new concepts and ideas that could be applied to our situation in Georgia," she says. "Much of what I learned helped me improve my clinical knowledge and skills, but I also learned how to foster behavioral change through patient education."

What was even more interesting for Revazishvili was seeing nurses in America take such an active role in direct patient care. "As soon as I returned from my first exchange, I told my colleagues how different nursing is in the United States. American nurses have a much higher level of education and training, therefore they have more responsibilities. When I told everyone, they all wanted to be part of the effort to move us in that direction," she recalls. "So, as a group, we all committed to being open to new ideas and learning all we could from our partners."

For her part, Revazishvili focused on learning all she could about chronic diseases



PHOTO: SUZANNE E. GRINNAN

Thanks to the training she received through Mtskheta's partnership with Milwaukee, primary care nurse Nino Revazishvili now plays an important role in helping patients manage hypertension.

and how to design programs that would both help patients better understand their condition and give them the tools they need to manage it effectively. "Because hypertension is such a huge concern in our region, my colleagues and I came up with the idea for a 'Healthy Heart' program that would focus on frequent patient visits to closely monitor each participant's blood pressure and any medication they were taking. At the same time, we would educate them about the things they should be doing to alleviate stress and other factors that contribute to hypertension," Revazishvili explains.

The partners worked together to design a patient education curriculum and materials, while continuing to provide the Georgian practitioners with many opportunities to increase their knowledge about hypertension and hone their clinical skills through exchanges and workshops. "One of the most important things I learned was how to interact more effectively with patients ... to provide them with information they can use and advice they will listen to. It is critical for people to really understand how a disease

In the old Soviet paradigm of health-care, nurses had very limited responsibilities for direct patient care. As countries in this region work to create a more efficient and cost-effective way of delivering health-related services, however, primary care has taken center stage allowing nurses to play an increasingly important role in community health. At the Mtskheta Family Medicine Center, which was established in 2001 by AIHA's Mtskheta-Mtianeti/Milwaukee partnership, nurses have taken the lead in creating patient education programs that enable those living with chronic diseases to better manage their conditions. This is the story of a nurse who helped develop the Center's "Healthy Heart" program; the story of one of her patients is on the other side.

affects the system and how their actions can either help or hurt them," Revazishvili acknowledges, noting that nurses are particularly well-suited to patient education. "Many people think doctors are so far above them. We seem more approachable and down-to-earth, so patients are more comfortable opening up and talking about their habits and fears."

So far, more than half of the 600 patients in the "Healthy Heart" program have proved that they are willing to change their habits if it means they will live a longer, healthier life. "About 53 percent of the participants have brought their blood pressure within normal range, which is a great improvement over the 29 percent of patients who were controlling their condition before we started the program," Revazishvili concludes, smiling proudly. "The knowledge I gained through our partnership has enabled me to take on more professional responsibilities and—when I share that knowledge with my patients—I enable them to take greater responsibility for themselves."

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