

Reaching Out Through the Magee-Women's Partnership

By Rachel Mays and Vadim O. Lopukhin, MD

From childbirth education to information on family planning choices, the Soviet health care system never placed a priority on teaching consumers about their own health. Even today, there are practically no formal state-sponsored programs aimed at helping the population make better decisions about health care. In the face of escalating rates of teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, Savior's Hospital for Peace and Charity in Moscow, Russia--in partnership with Magee-Women's Hospital in Pittsburgh, PA--shaped a community outreach program focusing on women's health care.

The Savior's program incorporates a number of initiatives, including the Woman and Family Education Center, the Family Planning Clinic, and, most recently, birth house (see below). In addition, the partnership launched two national networks that spread the program's message across the Russian Federation.

"We have forged a new model for women's health care that is comprehensive, caring and safe," said Alexander Goldberg, MD, president and chief physician at Savior's Hospital.

Woman and Family Education Center

The Woman and Family Center is the first comprehensive health education program in Russia that offers a variety of programs taught by professionally trained health educators using materials especially designed for consumers. Staffed by five full-time educators--a physician, a nurse manager and three nurse midwives--the center has provided women's health training to more than 16,000 women. In addition to classes for members of the community, the center provides training for health care professionals in Moscow clinics and birth houses. The center also operates a satellite site at Hospital No. 72 in the Kuntsevo region of Moscow.

To facilitate learning, the partnership publishes "Woman and Family," a quarterly bulletin in English and Russian. They also created a 30-minute video, "Partners in Birth," which emphasizes the importance of family-centered maternity care in Russia.

Childbirth education is one of the main focuses of the center. Classes use interactive teaching methods and a variety of visual aids including models, posters and video films. Evaluation forms show that expectant parents value not only the information and skills they learn but the opportunity to interact with one another.

"Participating in my son's birth was a most incredible experience for me, and the classes helped us to prepare for birth physically and psychologically," said Andrei Lapko, a new father and graduate of the center.

The initial results of this outreach effort are rewarding. A preliminary study done among 200 women in two Moscow birth houses--half of whom had completed the Savior's program--showed that those who had the preparation had fewer unplanned Caesarean sections, less episiotomal tearing and were likely to breast-feed their babies longer.

Last September, the Moscow city government designated Savior's as the site of the Eastern District of Moscow Regional Family Planning Center. "We consider the Center to be the official city childbirth education resource center for the city of Moscow," said Ivan Leshkevich, MD, first deputy director of the Main Medical Administration of Moscow.

A grant from World Learning, a non-profit, USAID-funded humanitarian organization, will establish 24 centers based on the Savior's-Magee model throughout Russia. Suzdal, one of the cities replicating Savior's efforts, was chosen for Russia's first interactive ASPO/Lamaze educational seminar last September. Although the concept behind Lamaze began in Russia in

1949, it was never popularized and was not applied until we introduced this as part of our training.

Family Planning Clinic

Opened in June 1994, the Family Planning Clinic at Savior's serves more than 5,000 women annually. Based on the model for family planning services used at Magee, the clinic is the first of its kind in the Eastern District of Moscow.

"We emphasize an individual approach and commitment to providing the most up-to-date information so a woman can make an informed choice [about birth control]," explains Nadezhda Golubeva, MD, a gynecologist with the center.

At the clinic, a nurse midwife records a patient's medical history and discusses the woman's needs for birth control, taking into account her age, marital status, lifestyle and level of education. Russian-language brochures and educational materials augment individual consultations.

Family planning education has begun to show results in the community. Over 30 percent of the clinic's clients use birth control pills, a figure almost 10 times higher than the national average.

Adolescent Program

During the last decade, the number of young Russian couples having sexual intercourse before age 18 has increased by approximately 20 percent. In Moscow, a third of the women between ages 15 and 19 already need contraceptives. In St. Petersburg, almost every tenth mother who gave birth to a child before she was 18, had begun having sex before she was 14. In Russia, only seven to 11 percent of teenage couples use contraceptives from the beginning.

All this served as the impetus for creating the adolescent sex education and clinical program. Instructors from the Woman and Family Center have conducted classes with more than 6,000 teenagers in the Eastern Administrative District's secondary and vocational schools, increasing their awareness of family planning and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Lydmila Selyavina, deputy head of Moscow Department of Education, supports the center's efforts to bring health lifestyle education to teenagers in the district. "The lectures and discussions were well-received by our teachers and students. Many educational institutions of the capital's Eastern District are willing to continue the cooperation with the Woman and Family Center in the future within the framework of the joint partnership," she said.

Most recently, the center sponsored "Teen Day," in which more than 200 teens from local schools gathered to discuss adolescent health issues, including concerns surrounding STDs and AIDS. The partnership also recently received a grant from the Soros Foundation to implement its adolescent health education curriculum and training-of-trainers program throughout Moscow and in 12 other cities in Russia.

Russian Womancare Clinic Network

In July 1995, the Family Planning Clinic at Savior's launched the Russian Womancare Clinic Network. The network will establish 18 independent women's health clinics in 18 regions of Russia during the next two years. Each clinic will be paired with an education center to serve as a comprehensive health care model. Savior's-Magee will assist some of the other AIHA partnerships (particularly in Murmansk and Dubna) in establishing these programs.

With all our programs, our innovative model of patient-centered care has survived the test of time and cross-cultural relations. More than 6,000 teenagers have completed the Center's classes; the partnership prepared childbirth course has been incorporated into the Russian Ministry of Health's "Safe Motherhood" federal initiative; and the "Rural Outreach to Russia"

campaign has already trained childbirth educators and opened women's health education centers in 12 cities in Russia. As we celebrate the recent completion of our birth house, we look to our students--especially the youth--and sincerely hope that our work will provide an improved model of health care for these young women and their future families.

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Savior's Delivers New Program

The Savior's-Magee partnership celebrated the opening of a birth house last September. Currently, the center serves family planning and ambulatory care needs. In the coming year services will expand to give families the opportunity to participate in all aspects of the birth process. This approach differs radically from traditional models because it requires that more attention be given to individual patient needs and staff be dedicated to providing this new level of care. Midwives will play a greater role in the management of care than in the past.

With the opening of the birth house, Savior's plans to create one of the leading teaching and research facilities in Russia. The city health department has recently announced plans to create a full-scale perinatal center at Savior's. Plans are also underway to expand the physician training program to bring obstetricians and gynecologists from across the NIS to Savior's to draw on the hospital's pioneering experience in family-centered childbirth. And this, Savior's hopes, will mean the potential for joint research in obstetrics with colleagues from Magee and the University of Pittsburgh. "This is an excellent opportunity for our partnership to expand its role into the broader medical community," said Vadim O. Lopukhin, MD, chief obstetrician at Savior's Hospital.

--Joanne Neuber