



THE REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE HUB FOR THE CARE AND TREATMENT OF HIV/AIDS IN EURASIA

By Kathryn Utan

Established in March 2004 to first focus on strengthening capacity in Ukraine—the country in the region that has been hardest hit by the epidemic—then to quickly expand its efforts by providing training and technical support to other countries in Eurasia facing similar challenges in caring for HIV-infected individuals, the Regional Knowledge Hub for the Care and Treatment of HIV/AIDS in Eurasia is part of a synergistic network that includes two sister centers in the World Health Organization's European Region (WHO/Europe)—one based in Lithuania that focuses on harm reduction and another in Croatia that concentrates on second generation HIV surveillance. These centers are designed to build technical capacity in countries throughout the region as they work to effectively access and utilize grants available through the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and other large-scale donor organizations. All three centers operate within the framework of WHO/Europe's project, "Capability Strengthening for Improved Utilization of Financial Resources to Fight HIV/AIDS," which is funded by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ).

While the Knowledge Hub provides limited direct technical assistance, its broader purpose is to serve as a nucleus of collaboration among individuals and institutions involved in HIV-related care in the region. As such, it taps into the strengths of the many international and local organizations committed to assisting the designated priority countries of Armenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine to develop expertise among healthcare professionals, cultivate training capacity so knowledge and skills can be passed on to others, and mass a body of evidence-based resources and informational materials to improve care and support available to PLWHA.

The idea to create a coordinating mechanism to facilitate training and the productive exchange of up-to-date, evidence-based research regarding HIV/AIDS treatment is rooted in a clear understanding of the importance of bringing international expertise and a greater awareness of WHO's public health approach to HIV/AIDS closer to countries in the region that need it most, according to WHO/Europe Medical Officer Irina Eramova. "The Knowledge Hub is an essential conduit for scaling up access to treatment in Eurasia within the framework of WHO's '3 by 5' initiative. It is helping build local capacity among healthcare workers and creating a core group of trainers who can pass along standardized, high-quality information about the provision of antiretroviral (ARV) regimens, case

management, monitoring and evaluation guidelines, and clinical care protocols," Eramova explains.

Because HIV/AIDS is a disease that requires a multidisciplinary team approach to care, Knowledge Hub curricula are designed with two key purposes in mind:

- To teach clinicians the specialized skills they need in subject areas such as the provision of voluntary counseling and testing, management of opportunistic infections, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, as well as the administration of ART to both children and adults; and
- To introduce the concept of a holistic continuum of care that draws on the varied skills and expertise of a multidisciplinary team of healthcare and social service providers.

The first trainings conducted at the Hub have been lauded by session participants as a crucial step toward improving both the quality and scope of HIV/AIDS-related services available in the region. According to Olga Dashovets, an infectious disease specialist at the Kiev City AIDS Center who attended a Hub training in the spring of 2004, the concept of a team approach is indeed a new one for most healthcare practitioners in the region. "Because we have little or no experience working in a system that uses a multi disciplinary team to provide comprehensive care to patients, training workshops that describe the method—actually show it in practice—and clearly illustrate the important contributions social workers and non-medical care-givers can make are critical," she says.

For Dnipropetrovsk social worker Marina Barinova, the Hub training session she attended last spring allowed her to expand her knowledge and practical skills. "The workshop gave me a really good understanding of the importance of creating a healthcare team capable of addressing the medical and social aspects of HIV/AIDS care. The sessions helped me clarify my own role in the provision of care and support, and especially how effective counseling can help ensure that patients remain adherent to treatment recommendations," Barinova explains, noting that the books and other materials she received during the training have become key resources that she refers to virtually every day in her practice.

Like Barinova, Nadezda Alexandrova was pleased with what she learned. As a nurse at the Donetsk Oblast AIDS Center for more than five years, Alexandrova sees approximately 30 HIV-infected patients each week, helping to manage ARV regimens for those receiving therapy. "The training session gave us the tools we need to begin implementing a team approach at our Center and we've already taken steps to do so," she stresses. "It's also important to note that there are very few advanced training opportunities available for nurses in Ukraine, so this workshop and others like it are crucial for our professional development."

As the Knowledge Hub expands its programs throughout Ukraine and to other countries in the region, it will coordinate with various organizations that are already offering related training and capacity-building programs. For example, Odessa's Southern Ukraine AIDS Education Center (SUAEC)—developed with support from USAID and acknowledged as a regional pioneer in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV—is already providing technical assistance and training, drawing on their own experience of reducing the rate of vertical transmission by 75 percent in less than three years (see “Leading the Charge: Southern Ukraine AIDS Education Center Provides Clinical Training to Prevent Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV Throughout Eurasia,” p. 67).

As Ukraine and other countries throughout the region work to create and implement comprehensive care, treatment, and support programs that address the needs of PLWHA, the Knowledge Hub for the Care and Treatment of HIV/AIDS in Eurasia will play an important role by assisting these nations to build critical human and institutional capacity to meet a growing need. ■

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Organizations with extensive experience working on issues related to the provision of high-quality, comprehensive HIV/AIDS care, treatment, support, and advocacy contribute to the Knowledge Hub.

Some of these partners include:

- AIDS Foundation East-West
- AIDS Healthcare Foundation-Global Immunity
- American International Health Alliance
- Connect plus e.V.
- International Association of Physicians in AIDS Care
- International HIV/AIDS Alliance
- International Training & Education Center on HIV
- Kiev City AIDS Center
- Kiev Medical Academy for Post-graduate Education
- Lavra AIDS Clinic at the Institute of Epidemiology and Infectious Diseases
- Médecins Sans Frontières
- Medical Advocates for Social Justice
- Open Society Institute's International Palliative Care Initiative
- Ukrainian AIDS Prevention Center

USING THE INTERNET TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO HIV/AIDS INFORMATION IN EURASIA

By Victor Stanilevskiy

An Internet-based component of the Kiev-based Regional Knowledge Hub for the Care and Treatment of HIV/AIDS in Eurasia, www.AIDSKnowledgeHub.org is designed to bring together a community of global and regional HIV/AIDS experts, policymakers, and patients by providing a wide range of networking and information exchange opportunities, as well as giving free access to key documents and materials—such as treatment protocols, guidelines, and additional relevant HIV/AIDS-related care and treatment resources—in both English and Russian languages.

CURRENT POSTED DOCUMENTS INCLUDE:

- WHO HIV/AIDS Treatment and Care Protocols for Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States;
- Medical Management of HIV Infection



Photo: Grigory Naumovets.

Lectures given by HIV/AIDS specialists at the Knowledge Hub are augmented by hands-on practical sessions conducted at treatment clinics in Kiev and additional mentoring sessions at participants' home institutions.

- (J.G. Bartlett and J.E. Gallant);
- HIV Medicine 2003 (H. Albrecht, C. Hoffmann, and B.C. Kamp, Eds.); and
- GALEN Modules developed by the International Association of Physicians in AIDS Care (IAPAC) Global AIDS Learning and Education Network.

In addition to clinical resources, the Knowledge Hub Web site features interactive elements such as online training modules, networking tools, an HIV/AIDS

glossary, discussion forums, and other tools that facilitate the cooperative exchange of knowledge and information among HIV/AIDS experts, organizations, and patients. The site also provides information on existing region-wide HIV/AIDS projects, conferences, and events, as well as an HIV/AIDS Community Network that lists scientists, community activists, government officials, and other people who possess valuable knowledge about the virus.

The Knowledge Hub site utilizes many of the resources of the EurasiaHealth AIDS Knowledge Network (EAKN), an HIV/AIDS-focused component of www.EurasiaHealth.org, which is a clearinghouse of freely available resources created and translated by and for a worldwide community of health professionals working in Eurasia established and maintained by AIHA. The main objective of this bilingual (English/Russian) Internet-based resource is to assist doctors, nurses, policymakers, and patients by providing them with access to the latest HIV/AIDS research, guidelines, and educational and networking tools. ■