

Reaching Out to Patients and Communities

A number of the conference breakout sessions focused on ways partnerships are working to better involve both individual patients and entire communities in taking responsibility for health. >From improved patient education to some of the first private-sector fundraising projects for health care in CEE, the sessions illustrated an array of accomplishments.

Improving Outcomes Through Patient and Family Education

Teaching patients and their families about how to manage chronic conditions and about post-operative care has led to shorter lengths of stay, lower costs and increased patient satisfaction in many CEE hospitals.

"Patients often feel out of control. But they feel empowered with education, no matter what country. The patient needs to be seen as the center of the health care model," said Carol Dabek, RNC, director of the home care program at Women and Infants Hospital of Rhode Island.

By way of illustration, Jaroslava Kronevetterova, RN, chief nurse in the pediatric department at Kosice Faculty Hospital in Slovakia, relayed the story of a 4-year-old boy with a brain tumor who cried inconsolably when he first entered the hospital. But after playing games with dolls to illustrate anesthesia, injections and other procedures and watching videotapes about the operation, both the boy and his parents felt more comfortable.

"The results were a great surprise for partners and a nice reward for us. The boy's post-operative recovery was three days shorter than normal, and when he came back in three weeks for follow-up, this time he didn't cry anymore," Kronevetterova said.

Srebrnjak Children's and Adolescents' Hospital for Respiratory Diseases in Zagreb saw similar results for patents with asthma. As the hospital added to its library of educational pamphlets and instituted both in-hospital and outpatient classes for children with asthma, patients were hospitalized much less frequently and for shorter periods. And the diabetes club at Vac Municipal Hospital in Hungary is now the serving as a model for other similar support groups for diabetics across the country at the request of the Ministry of Health.

Fundraising for Hospitals and Communities

With centralized funding and control, it was unheard of in the past for CEE health systems to reach out to the general public for money. But today, as they try to smooth the way to independence, additional funding sources are critical, David Valinsky, regional vice president for development with the Franciscan Health System of the Ohio Valley, told participants at a round table discussion on fundraising.

For example, much of the equipment at Zadar, Croatia's General Hospital, was more than 15 years old and the antiquated building was in need of repairs. To help raise money for the hospital, partners with the Franciscan Health System helped teach hospital employees how to use the media to generate concern, to set up an influential board of directors to help reach out to wealthier members of community and reach out to sports stars and other celebrities of Croatian descent in America and elsewhere for contributions. The hospital hopes to raise \$500,000 over the next three years.

Similarly, officials in the Slovak town of Turcianske Teplice appealed to local civic groups, businesses and schools in the community and to officials across the country to raise money for the town's first ambulance. With \$40,000 from these sources, the ambulance was purchased

and outfitted earlier this year. In raising the money, the community learned several important lessons, said Jozef Turcany, chief of staff at the city hall: it's important to set up a system to recognize contributors, don't be afraid of approaching new potential contributors (the town is now asking health insurance companies to donate to a health promotion and screening center) and tax laws need to be changed to encourage charitable contributions.

Educating the Public About Drug Use

In order to combat a rising tide of drug use among teenagers in Petrzalka, Slovakia, the Aid to Children at Risk Foundation--a healthy communities partner with Truman Medical Center in Kansas City, Missouri--last year began convening monthly drug forums to provide community members with a platform to discuss the issue. The forums have been a huge success, said former foundation president Jana Sturova, PhD, and the mayor and chief of police now regularly attend.

"This is something that takes simple skills--how to make people communicate with each other," she said. The forums have no pre-determined agenda, but they often include a video about a drug treatment community in Poland, and allot time for parents, kids and former drug addicts to talk about their personal experiences. "We always have non-academics there to provide an alternative perspective--people like singers and artists who have experience with it," Sturova added.

The local media have been instrumental in generating interest in the forums. "We make sure to take every opportunity to talk to the media, to do interviews and have press conferences. It can be a very strong tool," said Sturova. When the first forums convened, she pointed out, the mayor was hesitant to attend. But after public attention increased over several months, he asked to be invited, and now meets with constituents in a separate room following the forums to address individual concerns.