

World Bank Backs Primary Care Efforts in NIS

Across the NIS, national health reform initiatives funded by the World Bank are devoting substantial resources to bolstering primary care, reflecting a growing interest on the part of health officials in the region.

In Uzbekistan, for example, funds from a \$30-million loan recently approved by the World Bank will be applied to a sweeping conversion of 300 Soviet-style rural health stations to new primary care centers. According to World Bank health program team leader for Uzbekistan Jack Langenbrunner, the five-year, three-oblast project aims to provide equipment for the centers, train a new cadre of general practitioners, and develop new management and financing systems for use in the centers.

A World Bank loan for a ten-year health reform program in Kazakstan, expected to be approved this year, will similarly support strengthening primary care centers through equipment and training, but will also include a component supporting tuberculosis control at the primary care level. With the assistance of the World Health Organization, general and family medicine practitioners will be trained to use the directly-observed treatment (DOTS) method.

Armenian health reformers are currently using World Bank funds to train general practitioners, provide grants to communities to repair and equip primary care facilities, and establish guidelines for screening and diagnostic procedures, medical case management, and financial and outpatient administration in primary care settings.

"Primary care is now a priority not only for the Ministries of Health but for governments [in the NIS] in general," said Betty Hanan, World Bank health program team leader for Kazakstan.