

Romanian Partners Sharpen Health Management Skills

By Julia Ross

The southern Carpathian Mountains provided an idyllic setting for 24 physicians, administrators and nurses from Cluj, Romania and surrounding areas to hone their health care management skills last December. The group attended a nine-day workshop, a first-time collaborative effort taught by Romanian faculty from AIHA's health management education partners in Bucharest and faculty from the US Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA), which covered topics such as leadership, strategic and financial planning, marketing, information management and human resources.

Health professionals from several districts adjoining Cluj attended the event, providing a unique opportunity for those from AIHA's three partnership institutions in Cluj--the Clinic for Occupational Diseases, the Medical Center for Health Services and Management and the Inspectorate of Public Health--to develop new friendships and open lines of communication with other colleagues in health management. The workshop also represented a first-time endeavor between partners in Cluj and Bucharest.

"The workshop had a very important impact in regard to learning the scientific method in approaching management issues and management strategy, as well as aspects of practical management in organizing high quality health services," said Doina Udrea, MD, deputy director, Cluj-Napoca District Health Authority.

Participants got the opportunity to apply their newly acquired theoretical and practical management knowledge during the workshop's final days, when they presented projects tailored to their individual professional needs. Project titles included: "Developing a Public Health Epidemiology Department Within the Academic Hospital in Cluj;" "Involvement of Class Teachers in Health Promotion in Romanian Schools;" "Development of an Occupational Health Service in a Big [Industrial] Plant;" and "Development of an International Institute of Rural and Environmental Health."

Faculty members provided an assessment of each presentation and lively group discussion followed. Participants planned to implement the projects at their home institutions, and will meet again in early summer to share their success stories and discuss any obstacles that may have arisen.

Faculty members also found the week's experience inspiring. Ioana Gheorghiev, MD, a physician specialist in public health and management at the Institute of Hygiene, Public Health, Health Services and Management in Bucharest, said she appreciated the chance to watch US colleagues teach health management, as well as to meet and challenge Romanian health practitioners from different regions of the country.

"It was a wonderful opportunity to put together good theoretical material with examples from Romania" agreed Dana Minca, MD, PhD, associate professor at "Carol Davila" University in Bucharest and the workshop's second Romanian instructor.

"As the Romanian health system is just now facing reform," she said, "I think it is very important for the people in key positions to implement change to have knowledge and skills in modern management concepts, as we all know that this area was not covered in traditional medical training." Minca and Gheorghiev hope to develop teaching materials similar to the AUPHA handbook used in the workshop.

Participants agreed that conducting the workshop at a mountain retreat, away from the distractions of home and office, helped to foster an unusually high level of formal and informal communication. The participatory and team-building approaches used by the faculty also drew

high marks from the group, many of whom had never been exposed to such methods in a learning environment.

"[The faculty] were able to induce a high interest and motivation in the participants, who were completely unfamiliar with the approached issues," said Lucian Tefas, MD, of the Clinic for Occupational Diseases. "I can say, without exaggerating, that this interest went up every day, although the high volume of information and its difficulty could have been boring."

"A friendly and productive environment was created from the very beginning," added Eugen Gurzau, MD, director of the Medical Center for Health Services and Management. "We all realized how important these partnership activities are, and that they should continue in the same atmosphere of love, patience and friendly feelings for better future cooperation."