

Almaty-Tucson Partnership Makes Strides in Nursing

By Curtiss Swezy, DrPH

In less than three years, the Almaty-Tucson partnership has addressed a broad array of health and management issues, including birthing practices, perinatal care, pediatrics, toxicology, infection control, surgery and emergency medical services. Management issues have also been tackled, including using resources more efficiently, generating income within the hospital systems, and improving quality of care within an environment of declining resources. Spanning all of these areas of technical assistance has been the partnership nursing program, which focuses on improving and expanding clinical and administrative nurse training within the Kazak health care system.

"Nursing is an essential link in any health care system," explained Kalkaman Ayapov, MD, MPH, president of the Almaty Medical College in Almaty, Kazakstan. "The partnership approach to nursing reform has been very helpful in creating new concepts of nursing--not only at our college, but throughout Kazakstan."

Curriculum Reform

When the partnership began in 1993, the training of nurses in Kazakstan consisted of two years of post-secondary, specialized education at a medical college. Ayapov and Almaty Medical College Vice President Galina Beisenova, MD, focused on revamping nurses' basic education in order to expand their role in the evolving Kazak health care system. Working with nursing education specialists from Tucson, partners decided not to merely revise the existing curriculum, but to develop a new four-year program of training for high school graduates to better prepare entry-level nurses for an expanded role.

"The Almaty-Tucson partnership program is working to introduce expanded nurse roles that cover both the clinical and the psycho-social needs of the patient," explained Emily Jenkins, Almaty-Tucson project director. "We modified the existing two-year nursing curriculum to respond to our partners' desire to expand the role of the nurse. I think it is an excellent way to respond to the needs of the labor force [and nurse shortage] and to respond to the future--and that is going to be what moves nursing forward and keeps it current."

Ten nurses from Tucson hospitals have visited Almaty to help shape curriculum reform, and 16 nurses and nursing faculty from participating Almaty institutions have been trained in Tucson.

The new four-year curriculum both updates information presented in the classroom and greatly expands the practical training nursing students receive while working under supervision in Almaty hospitals. Three partner hospitals, the Almaty First Aid Hospital, the Almaty Perinatal Center and the Kazak Scientific Research Center of Pediatrics and Children's Surgery now provide clinical rotations for student nurses at their institutions.

Ayapov moved to institutionalize the modern training of nurses by obtaining approval of the new curriculum from both the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education. In addition, the Ministry of Labor approved four new job classifications for nurses, one for each year of nursing training, thus giving students the flexibility to go to work after each year of nursing school, with higher salaries for each year of schooling completed. Fourth-year nursing graduates will enter the health system at a higher pay level--equal to that of entry-level physicians from the Institute of Medicine.

The first fourth-year class of nursing students began their studies at the Almaty Medical College in Fall 1995. Nurses who completed two-year training under the old system begin as third-year students. Ayapov, in concert with Ministry of Health officials, has shared this new nursing curriculum with faculty from other medical colleges. By the beginning of 1996, a total

of 13 nursing schools in Kazakhstan had, or were in the process of adopting, the new curriculum, affecting the training of more than 7,000 students (see table).

A Tucson nursing committee comprised of nurses from academic institutions and hospitals continues to work with Almaty colleagues to identify nursing roles, develop curriculum and clinical practice sites, and evaluate and revise academic programs so that nurses are prepared for the actual needs of a changing work place.

Night School

Almaty Medical College recently created an innovative program for senior nurses. Nurses already working in a hospital setting are given the opportunity to update and reinforce their basic nursing education, thus making them eligible for expanded nursing roles and senior pay grades. The program offers one of the first night schools for nurses anywhere in the former Soviet Union.

In September 1995, 50 senior nurses enrolled in the course, which meets four nights a week. In two and one-half years they will be able to complete years three and four of the new curriculum and graduate as baccalaureate nurses.

This new curriculum also offers nurses a change to learn about other AIHA-initiated programs, such as the EMS training program. Dina Bulanbaeva, MD, director of Almaty's EMS Training Center, has designed a component in EMS for the night school program that she will teach.

"I am very delighted with my studies at the night school," said Telli Asiyeva, head nurse at City Mental Health Center in Almaty, Kazakhstan. "I've received a lot of new information...[with which I will] train my subordinate nurses. I think this school is absolutely essential."

In-service Training

The partnership has also promoted advances in nurses' in-service training. The Almaty Health Administration found infection control to be an area of particular interest. Responding to an administration request, Tucson partners presented a training-of-trainers infection control course to faculty of the nursing school. This instruction covers basic infection control techniques, including hand-washing, proper handling of linens and sterilization of surgical instruments.

"The training in infection control is raising the level of nursing care and decreasing nosocomial infections throughout Kazakhstan," noted Farida Mukhanova, MD, director of the Republican School for Continuing Education in Allied Health, the school responsible for regular in-service training. "We need to expand this program; we are very interested in further cooperation with our colleagues from Tucson."

As illustration of the program's influence, a number of similar training programs on infection control have been launched throughout Kazakhstan. By the end of 1995, the school had provided this instruction to 150 nurses from 15 Almaty institutions, and another 350 nurses from 150 institutions around Kazakhstan. The city health administration also created the new position of infection control nurse at all 11 Almaty hospitals.

During the past year, an extensive effort has been made by the partners to expand existing infection control protocols so that their practices are more effective and scarce laboratory resources are more efficiently used. The first step toward that goal was a partnership demonstration project on infection control surveillance, which was hosted at the Kazak Scientific Research Center of Pediatrics and Children's Surgery. The findings from this study and other research are being evaluated with the Kazak Ministry of Health to revise current national infection control regulations. Once the new regulations are adopted, partners will

develop an advanced training-of-trainers course for staff of the Sanitary Epidemiology Service and hospital physicians and nurses.

The Changing Role of Nurses

The role of the nurse has changed significantly in AIHA hospital partnerships in Almaty--and across Kazakstan--since the program's inception in 1993. The Kazak Scientific Research Center, for example, recently created the new nurse educator position for nurse orientation and training, with an emphasis on care of pediatric cancer patients. The center also promoted the creation of a nurse manager position for its blood bank, making the center one of the few hospitals in Kazakstan to endorse this expanded role for nurses. Similarly, the First Aid Hospital has requested training for nurses in the operating room and the recovery unit. The perinatal center will have a nurse-managed post-partum recovery unit.

Physicians are finding that the new roles for nurses complement physician practice. According to Ayapov, attitudinal shifts about the scope of nursing work, combined with the recent creation of the Kazak Nursing Association, will make the integration of new nursing roles much easier.

"They are trying to set up nurse-managed units where that philosophy and advanced role of the nurse is beginning to be recognized. And that is the paradigm shift--to see nurses working in collaboration with doctors," Jenkins said.

As nurses increase their educations and the scope of their responsibilities, patients also benefit. The increase in knowledge and a team approach with doctors allows nurses to better understand their patients' needs.

However, the most important aspect of this program is its outreach into the broader health care community. When shared with others, the ideas, achievements and strengths of individual nurse leaders and physicians in Kazak partnerships have had a significant effect--not only on nursing reform, but on the health care reform process throughout Kazakstan.

Curtiss Swezy, DrPH, is AIHA's director of program reporting and assessment.

TABLE

Kazakstan Medical Colleges Implementing the Four-Year Nursing Curriculum

CITY MEDICAL COLLEGE NURSING STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Almaty --- 619

Talgar --- 686

Balkhash --- 450

Taldy-Korgan --- 758

Pavlodar --- 600

Aktyubinsk --- 968

Akmola --- 667

Zhambyl --- 780

Ust'-Kamenogorsk --- 663

Petropavlosk --- 840

Termirtau --- TBA*

Turkestan --- TBA

Kokshetau --- TBA

- TBA: To be announced. Medical colleges in these cities will be introducing the curriculum in the near future.