

Promoting the Iasi Women's Wellness Center in the Press

BY BARBARA RUBEN AND BARBARA GABRIEL

When representatives from the AIHA Iasi/Minneapolis partnership held the opening day ceremonies for the new Women's Wellness Center in Iasi, Romania, on a Friday afternoon last October, the media turned out in full force to cover the event. Part of the attraction was the presence of Romanian first lady, Nadia Constantinescu, whose early support of the project led to her appointment as honorary chairperson of the Center. Another draw was that members of the press were treated to a pre-opening tour of the facility that included a question and answer session.

The reward for all the efforts put in to publicizing the WWC before it opened became readily apparent when the staff returned to work the following Monday—women were lined up outside the door, eager to take advantage of the services they had read and heard about over the weekend. Inside the facility, phones rang non-stop as more and more women who wanted to be seen by the WWC's physicians called for appointments. Today, the Center continues to lay down roots in the community by tapping the local media's capacity as a vehicle for disseminating information about its programs.

The story of Iasi's WWC is also the story of an effective media campaign that encouraged and obtained the support and participation of the community even before the Center's official opening. For months prior to that event, WWC Director Dr. Otilia Casian-Botez laid the groundwork for successful media relations. When partners from the Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis traveled

to Iasi in January 1999, Casian-Botez alerted journalists of their visit well in advance, ensuring ample media coverage.

"When we arrived to do our assessment, reporters came to interview us and film the Center as it was undergoing renovations," says Cheri Galbraith, manager of international programs at Hennepin County Medical Center and US partnership representative. "We outlined our



First Lady of Romania, Nadia Constantinescu, cuts the ribbon at the opening ceremony of the Iasi Women's Wellness Center. An early supporter of the project, she helped draw media attention to the new facility and its services.

Photo courtesy of Laura Coco.

plans for the Center and explained the roles of education, prevention, and self-care in keeping women healthy. This helped the community grasp the concept of women's wellness early on."

Galbraith's second visit with WWC staff was also greeted by media coverage. Dr. Casian-Botez had kept in contact with members of the local media who had covered the first visit, and she advised them of the second one as well. During this July 1999 trip, national media outlets picked up on the local coverage, enabling many more people to learn about the Center's

services. "By that time, the WWC was nearly fully renovated," Galbraith explains. "Camera crews again came to film it and those citizens viewing the images could see that it was very modern. Dr. Casian-Botez and I were both interviewed, as were some patients, since the Center had already begun seeing a few women."

Then, last August when a baby girl was born at the Center during a solar eclipse, Dr. Casian-Botez again called in the press "She knows how to give them the right hooks that will attract their interest," Galbraith says of the Center's director.

To promote the WWC, Dr. Casian-Botez talks directly with journalists, emphasizing the importance of their role in disseminating accurate healthcare information to members of the local community, county, and country as a whole. She invites them to work with the WWC to put together stories about women's health and volunteers the expertise of the Center's physicians in helping them verify clinical information.

According to Galbraith, her experience with the Iasi Center's successful use of the media as a vehicle to educate the public about women's health issues and its services has led her to recognize the most important element of any media campaign—relationship building.

Galbraith says that "the key to successful media partnership is to maintain regular contact with journalists, editors, and reporters, and to work at building mutually fulfilling relationships with them. Identify specific topics—such as adolescence, menopause, or clinical screening—that will grab their attention. Over time, they will perceive you as a trusted source of information and will come to you of their own accord."

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