

Partnership Works

Petrzalka-Kansas City

Slovakia's Aid to Children at Risk Foundation received the Missouri Governor's Award for Community Initiatives October 8 in recognition of its contributions to assessing and improving community health status. Governor Mel Carnahan presented one of 15 awards to foundation director Jana Sturova in Jefferson City, Missouri. The foundation was the only award recipient from outside the state. Ladislav Snopko, former minister of culture for Slovakia, and Miroslav Musil, counselor for the Embassy of Slovakia, also attended the event.

Part of the healthy communities partnership between Petrzalka, Slovakia and Kansas City, Missouri, the Aid to Children at Risk Foundation promotes healthy lifestyles and mobilizes community groups to fight drug abuse among teenagers. The Governor's Awards are sponsored by Missouri's Community Health Assessment Resource Team (CHART) project, which develops partnerships aimed at identifying local health needs and implementing long-term interventions.

In September, Sturova spoke about the components of a healthy community at Romania's first national conference on health promotion and education. The conference, titled "Community Involvement and Fundamental Elements for Health Promotion Interventions," was organized by the Institute of Hygiene, Public Health, Health Services and Management, an AIHA partner, and the Inspectorate for Sanitary Police Constanta, with support from the World Health Organization and UNICEF.

L'viv-Detroit

Health professionals and ministry officials attending a rheumatic fever conference in L'viv, Ukraine on November 5 addressed concerns over the nation's high incidence of acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease, which strike more than 1,500 residents of L'viv Oblast annually.

The incidence of acute rheumatic heart disease is a "serious concern," requiring an estimated 19 percent of those affected to undergo cardiac surgery to return to an active lifestyle, noted Miroslava Struk, MD, partner coordinator at L'viv Oblast Clinical Hospital. Speaking to an audience of 100 health professionals and ministry officials from Ukraine, Struk and US partners from the Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, Michigan cited their collaborative attempts to reduce disease levels. Reasons for the continued spread of this highly infectious disease include overcrowding in the home, inadequate initial treatment of infectious diseases that lead to rheumatic fever, and an undersupply of antibiotics for treatment.

Since the initial rheumatic fever conference was held in fall of 1994, AIHA partners have created a regional rheumatic fever/ rheumatic heart disease epidemiologic survey form to identify a cohort of patients with chronic rheumatic heart disease. Hundreds of cases have been analyzed in L'viv Oblast, and initial results indicate that the incidence of rheumatic fever is moderately high in the Strij area of the oblast, said Zirka Kalynych, MD, HFHS senior staff physician, and director of the partnership rheumatic fever project. Kalynych described how the partnership created an advisory committee among L'viv physicians, community leaders and members of the press to disseminate information throughout the oblast about rheumatic fever and ways to prevent its spread.

Semipalatinsk-Houston

Semipalatinsk-Houston partners participated in the September 6 commemoration of the five-year anniversary of the end of nuclear testing at the Semipalatinsk Test Site in Kazakhstan, which was involved in the over 40 years of Soviet nuclear testing operations.

Kazak Minister of Health Vassilliy Devyatko addressed community questions about the region's health in a press conference with partners. He also announced the arrival of the \$1 million AmeriCares Corporation donation of cancer medication and antibiotics to Kurchatov and Semipalatinsk hospital partnerships.

And the newest member of the partnership, Semipalatinsk Gynecology Hospital, signed a memorandum of understanding with AIHA during the ceremony.

Semipalatinsk-Houston partners also co-hosted a November workshop, "Health Effects of Environmental Radiation Exposure," to promote discussion and evaluation of preliminary research findings among the region's oncologists, radiologists, pathologists, and epidemiologists. The workshop was attended by representatives from major Kazak institutes and the Kazak Ministry of Health, in addition to US researchers from the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and the Department of Energy.

During the five-day workshop, held in Kurchatov, Kazakhstan, researchers explored the feasibility of supporting research projects on immune system suppression, in utero and genetic effects of radiation exposure, and other research topics. Baylor College of Medicine researcher Leif Peterson, PhD, recommended that the region's scientists and clinicians begin banking DNA samples so that future genetic analysis can be done to determine genetic mutations.

Riga-St. Louis

The Riga-St. Louis partnership had a busy November, hosting both a Latvian Nursing Leadership Course and a National Hospice Conference in Riga. The two-week nursing course, attended by about 25 Latvian nurses and seven US nurse educators and administrators, included instruction on leadership and management skills, continuous quality improvement strategies, and various clinical topics. One nurse commented: "I am ready now to begin, with new vigor, the task set before me of helping my nursing staff move through the transition from their current role to a far more effective and efficient role in the new health care system."

The nurses completed surveys at the start of the course to measure their perceived level of control over anticipated changes in their professional lives. A second survey will be conducted in May to evaluate the impact the conference had on the nurses' professional skills.

At the Hospice Conference, held November 19-21, US and Latvian experts presented a multidisciplinary approach to providing care to the terminally ill and their families. Development of hospice services, pain control and symptom management, bereavement and after care, and funding strategies were among the topics addressed.

Dubna-LaCrosse

Russians consume twice as much liquor a year as the average person living in the European Union, according to WHO. But until recently Russia's resources to deal with alcoholism and provide alcohol education have been minimal. In September, partners working through USAID World Learning program held a conference in Dubna, Russia to educate participants from 15 cities throughout Russia about alcohol treatment. Attended by social workers, counselors and educators, the two-day conference covered a wide range of topics including support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, group therapy, and school-based prevention programs. Former alcoholics also spoke about their experiences.

The Dubna-LaCrosse partnership began work on alcoholism treatment services in 1993, and became a model for replication in five cities. Treatment facilities in each city have seen a steady increase of clients, with each treating at least 40 clients per quarter, said Barbara Pretasky, project coordinator for the partnership at Lutheran Hospital in LaCrosse. In addition, every alcohol counselor and community specialist trained as part of the program has been hired by city administrations.

Murmansk-Jacksonville

Surgeons from sunny Florida traveled to the Arctic Circle to co-sponsor a laparoscopy workshop with their Murmansk partners in November.

This third partnership conference on laparoscopy was attended by about 100 surgeons from Murmansk. Surgeons from Murmansk Regional Hospital and City Ambulance Center noted how an increased use of laparoscopic surgery has reduced postsurgical infection rates and hospital length of stay, which declined from an average 18 days in 1994, to three days in 1995 for gallbladder operations.

"It makes a big difference to make three incisions [with the use of a laparoscope], rather than opening up the entire abdomen to perform a cholecystectomy," said Julie Buckingham, US partner coordinator at Sister Cities International, Jacksonville, Florida.

Hands-on practice in laparoscopic surgery with training models followed the presentations. Other breakout sessions provided attendees the opportunity to share and discuss early diagnosis skills, anesthesia considerations in laparoscopy, and ways to reduce the cost of care.

Yerevan-Boston

A November teleconference on infection control linked 40 doctors and nurses from Emergency Scientific Medical Center in Yerevan with Boston University Medical Center in Massachusetts.

"This was an important teleconference, because it shows how our Armenian partners are working together as a health care team to address nosocomial infections at their hospital," said Marie Vartanian, RN, MAN, acting partner coordinator, Boston University Medical Center.

During the one and one-half hour teleconference, Armenian partners presented a case study on a patient who contracted Hepatitis B, which has increased in Yerevan recently due to inadequate equipment sterilization and insufficient public awareness campaigns. Partners hope to create an infection control surveillance system in Emergency Hospital with the help of their Boston partners in the upcoming year to address the high spread of infectious diseases like Hepatitis B.

Kosice-Providence

US faculty from Providence, Rhode Island spent four days teaching a group of physician and nurse leaders from Slovakia's Kosice Faculty Hospital to identify "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats" (SWOT) in budget planning, staffing and clinical innovations during the partnership's first hospital management workshop. The November workshop was also attended by the Slovak Deputy Minister of Health.

Learning to carry out a "prospective budgeting" process was particularly important to the 25 Slovak managers, said David Gagnon, MPH, executive director of the National Perinatal Information Center in Providence. "Their hospitals have been under retrospective budgets and they usually only know about their losses or gains a month or two after an event occurred," he

said. The workshop also addressed reimbursement, quality of care and patient information collection issues.

Odessa-Brooklyn

Hundreds of people in "Little Odessa" lined up for free pulmonary and blood pressure tests during the Brighton Beach Health Fair on August 25. The fair was part of the day-long Brighton Neighborhood Association Russian Festival in this primarily Russian-speaking immigrant community in Brooklyn, New York, which is home to an estimated 150,000 residents from the former Soviet Union, many of whom immigrated from Odessa. AIHA partner hospital Coney Island Hospital (CIH), which has the largest Russian-speaking patient population in the United States--estimated at 30 percent--coordinated the health fair.

CIH's Cynthia Meyers, RN, a 15-year veteran of similar community health fairs, volunteered her time to conduct pulmonary screening, to identify those who may have asthma, emphysema or bronchitis. Meyers found 15 people with pulmonary problems during the fair, and referred them to physicians at CIH for treatment.

The health fair in "Little Odessa" was very important, Meyers said, because citizens of Brighton Beach comprise 80 percent of CIH patients diagnosed with cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes. Unhealthy lifestyles and poor nutrition contribute to the incidence of these diseases, she said.

Informational brochures on a diabetes club and other Russian-language groups sponsored by CIH were provided to fair attendees. Russian-language brochures on topics ranging from alcoholism to physician referrals were also distributed.