

Connections

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Partner News



Ganja/Livermore Partners Launch New Primary Healthcare Partnership in Azerbaijan, Extend the Reach of AIHA's Community-based Twinning Model Beyond Baku

Officials from the Ganja City Health Administration met with representatives from

Public Health Department on May 20 in Ganja, Azerbaijan, to mark the start of AIHA's new Ganja/Livermore partnership. This is the first AIHA healthcare twinning partnership in Azerbaijan to be established outside the nation's capital of Baku.

During an official ceremony attended by city and regional officials, local healthcare providers, members of the mass media, and AIHA staff, the Azeri and US partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding in recognition of their commitment to work together to improve primary care service delivery in Ganja, Azerbaijan's second-largest city.



MOU signing ceremony in Ganja: (from left to right) Hasrat Huseynov, head of the Ganja City Health Administration, Jeyhoun Mamedov, AIHA regional coordinator for Azerbaijan (standing second on the left), David Mertes, chairman of the Board at the ValleyCare Health System, and Kate Schecter, AIHA program officer. (Photo: Elmir Jafarov.)

Located in the Caucasus Mountains near the Georgian border, Ganja is a city with a long industrial heritage dating back to Soviet times. Some 330,000 people—including 40,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees—reside in Ganja's two primary districts, Kapaz and Nizami. Additionally, the surrounding rural area is home to an estimated population of 1.5 million.

The partnership will develop new programs and approaches to improve quality of care and expand services in support of USAID's effort to enhance primary healthcare in Azerbaijan. The partners plan to engage in a comprehensive reorganization of the local health system by implementing skills-based professional development training for healthcare practitioners—particularly in the areas of clinical care and management—and introducing new information and evidence-based technologies.



David Mertes briefs journalists about the partnership's objectives. (Photo: Elmir Jafarov.)

Additionally, health promotion and disease prevention will play a significant role in improving the primary care services available to the Ganja community, so the partners will work to enhance the diagnostic capabilities of institutions in the region in concert with the development of extensive patient education and outreach programs.

Speaking at the event, AIHA Program Officer Kate Schecter shared her hope that this new twinning partnership would be a catalyst for improving the quality of community-based

primary care services in Ganja and its neighboring regions, noting, "We're extremely excited to be able to extend the reach of AIHA's primary care partnership model beyond Azerbaijan's capital city. Our three partnerships in Baku have been very successful and have ushered in many positive changes in health service delivery. I'm sure they will be an important resource for the Ganja/Livermore partners as they work to improve the scope and quality of care

available to the citizens of Ganja."



Documentary Highlighting AIHA's Partnership Programs Showcased at Capitol Hill Screening

United States representatives Nick Lampson of Texas and Mark Udall of Colorado hosted a reception June 22 on Capitol Hill in honor of their respective constituents from Galveston and Boulder whose work with AIHA partnerships in Armenia and Ukraine was highlighted in an episode of *The Visionaries*, a documentary series airing on selected PBS stations nationwide.

Welcoming to Washington three members of the Armavir/Galveston partnership from the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB), Rep. Lampson lauded the efforts of Cissy Yoes, director of knowledge management; Louise Hancock, director of nursing; and Douglas Matthews, director of external affairs, who have been involved with the partnership since 1999.



Armavir/Galveston partners Louise Hancock, Cissy Yoes, and Doug Matthews share a moment with Rep. Nick Lampson prior to the screening of *The Visionaries* documentary highlighting their work in Armavir.
(Photo: Evangeline Coleman-Crawford.)

"I also want to recognize the important work of all the physicians, nurses, psychologists, and other allied health professionals from UTMB and the many other Texas institutions who have volunteered more than 6,641 hours of their time to the good work of this partnership," Lampson said before turning the microphone over to Yoes, who is Armavir/Galveston's partnership coordinator.

Presenting attendees with her "Top 10 list" of benefits gained by the Galveston/UTMB community through their involvement in the AIHA partnership program, Yoes explained that, first and foremost, a partnership is about people.



Cissy Yoes discusses the "Top 10 Benefits" of being involved with AIHA's partnership program while Rep. Nick Lampson looks on.

(Photo: Evangeline Coleman-Crawford.)

"This partnership has, for many of us, been a time of personal and professional renewal. We've

bonded with our colleagues in Armenia, with our co-workers at home, and with our greater community. We feel we are all working together for a common purpose, using our knowledge and skills to make positive changes—both in Armavir and at home," she said.

Describing how relationships can become strained and counterproductive when many institutions in the same community are competing for limited resources, Yoes pointed out how the partnership process helped healthcare providers in Galveston band together for a common cause. "We developed new

ways of relating to each other by focusing on something outside of ourselves—something that we agreed on, were excited about, and really believe is the right thing to do."

Following Yoes's talk, Rep. Udall—joking about how nice it was for him to be closely collaborating with Texans because of the friendly rivalry that has long existed between the two states—spoke about the common bonds the partners share and their desire to reach out to the broader world community in the spirit of cooperation and goodwill. Introducing Odessa/Boulder partnership coordinator Barbara Fisher, he noted, "The type of work these partnerships are doing is not charity, it is sustainable development, and the benefits that accrue on both sides are priceless."



Rep. Mark Udall lauds the international outreach efforts of Boulder County Hospital. Also pictured (from left to right), Barbara Fisher, Cissy Yoes, and Rep. Nick Lampson. (Photo: Evangeline Coleman-Crawford.)

Fisher, who is vice president and international program coordinator at Boulder Community Hospital, shared some of her experiences working with not only the Odessa/Boulder partnership, but with another AIHA-sponsored partnership that paired Boulder with Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Together, Boulder's total in-kind contributions to these partnerships exceed \$900,000.

"We at Boulder Community Hospital are so fortunate that our Board of Directors understands that the 'community' in our name refers not only to Boulder and its environs; it refers to our world community. Our participation in these international programs is our way of reaching out and giving back," she explained.

Underscoring the fact that introducing comprehensive health services that allow for greater continuity of care is critical to the economic and social development of countries with limited resources, Fisher continued, "Our experiences with helping our Odessa partners create an effective system for the delivery of community-based primary care services resulted in the realization that we could help Odessa—and Ukraine—address one of the most critical health problems they are facing today, which is HIV/AIDS."



Barbara Fisher shares her thoughts on the importance of contributing to the welfare of the world community with reception guests. (Photo: Evangeline Coleman-Crawford.)

Boulder Community Hospital is the lead US partner institution in AIHA's project for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV and has been instrumental in Odessa's efforts to reduce the number of infants infected with HIV/AIDS, as well as to provide comprehensive, community-based care and services to people living with the virus.

After Fisher's speech, Kent R. Hill, assistant administrator of USAID's Bureau for Eastern Europe and Eurasia, spoke about the many contributions AIHA and its partners have made to the health reform process in Eurasia since the organization's inception 12 years ago.

Setting the stage for the *The Visionaries* episode—titled "Partners in Health"—Hill observed, "When most people think about the news, they usually associate it with what is bad in the world. A lot of people say they don't even turn on the television anymore because it depresses them. *The Visionaries* is different; it focuses on telling positive stories, stories about what is good in the world."



Odessa/Boulder partner Barbara Fisher chats with Nelson Simon, co-producer of *The Visionaries* episode, "Partners in Health." (Photo: Evangeline Coleman-Crawford.)

Stressing the value of partnerships and calling AIHA one of the best partners USAID has, Hill explained that, even though these alliances—and USAID's specific funding in a country or region—may be finite, the friendships, relationships, and institutional and community-to-community bonds forged through their collaborative efforts will remain as a testimony to the hard work and dedication of individual partners such as those featured in the documentary.

Paraphrasing the words Ben Raimer, UTMB vice president of community outreach, who was featured in "Partners in Health," Yoes summed up the partnership experience, stating, "There is excitement about partnerships such as ours—partnerships that focus on relationships. The potential that can be unleashed for the whole world by creating more of these partnerships and focusing on relationships is awesome. There would be less strife and stress in the world, we could begin to address the difficult issues of poverty, and the world could become a healthier place."

For more information on *The Visionaries* episode visit www.visionaries.org
—by Kathryn Utan, AIHA staff writer

Partners Showcase Innovative Programs for Youth at Global Health Council Annual Conference

Members of AIHA's L'viv/Cleveland and Split/New Jersey partnerships showcased their activities addressing the health needs of children and young adults at the 31st annual Global Health Council conference held in Washington, DC, June 1-4. This year's conference—titled "Youth and Health: Generation on the Edge"—served as a forum for some 1,600 public health professionals from around the world to share information about effective health-related programs targeting young people.

L'viv/Cleveland Partners Discuss School-based Depression Awareness Program

Speaking during a panel session titled "Throwing Light on Shadow: Assessing the Mental Health Needs of Youth," Kimberly Adams Tufts, director of education,



research, and service for Case Western Reserve University's Discover Nursing Program, shared some key accomplishments of the L'viv/Cleveland partners as they worked together to address depression and other mental health concerns of school children in Ukraine's Zhovkva Rayon.

Explaining that the partners began by conducting an overall assessment of the mental health needs of people living in Zhovkva, Adams Tufts said the purpose of this initial phase was two-fold: it enabled them to identify trends and priority areas and it helped garner community support. "Then, as we moved into the planning stage, we were able to provide specific mental health training for care providers and work on implementing 'Red Flags,' a depression awareness program that was created in Ohio and is currently being used at 91 schools throughout the state," she reported.



Members of AIHA's L'viv/Cleveland partnership who attended this year's Global Health Council conference in Washington, DC: (left to right) Yaroslav Krak, Kimberly Adams Tufts, Paul Omelsky, Carlyn Yanda, Andriy Mayba, and Yaroslav Petryshyn. (Photo: Kathryn Utan.)

Largely the result of one family's experience with mental illness, the Red Flags program was developed by the Mental Health Association of Summit County with support from the Ohio Department of Health, according to Adams Tufts. At its core, Red Flags helps parents, school staff, and young people themselves recognize—and effectively respond to—the signs of depression and related mental illness.

"Our discussion with child life specialists, psychiatrists, staff of Zhovkva Rayon's Family and Youth Department, and other key stakeholders revealed that they were seeing an increase in depression among adolescents in the region. It also revealed that mental illness was an issue that had much stigma attached to it," Adams Tufts pointed out.

Noting that Red Flags was developed to be used with kids of middle school age, she continued, "We felt the program was well-suited to the needs of the Zhovkva community because it helps students, their families, and school staff better understand depression, in part, by raising awareness about its prevalence. The commonality of people's experience with mental illness is central to the curriculum, which also helps 'normalize' depression," she said, explaining that partners established a pilot program in the Zhovkva Rayon town of Dobrosyn and have since published a training and reference manual in both English and Ukrainian.

In addition to Adams Tufts, US partners Carlyn Yanda, associate director of the Center for Adolescent Health at Case Western's School of Medicine; and Paul Omelsky, assistant medical director of Heartland Behavioral Healthcare attended the conference, as did three physicians from Zhovkva Central Rayon Hospital: Yaroslav Krak, pediatric psychiatrist; Andriy Mayba, psychiatrist; and Yaroslav Petryshyn, substance abuse specialist.

Split/New Jersey Partners Talk About Implementing a Community-based

Youth Alcohol Prevention Program

In a panel session titled, "Better Choices, Better Health: Addressing Substance Abuse in Youth," Bernadette West, assistant dean of the Stratford/Camden Campus of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey's School of Public Health (UMDNJ-SPH), discussed some of the highlights of the Split/New Jersey partnership's efforts to help young people in Croatia avoid use, and abuse, of alcohol.

Describing how partners decided to implement a public health intervention program to arm young people in Split—a resort town on Croatia's Adriatic Coast—with the information they need to avoid becoming dependant on alcohol, West explained, "Traumatic experiences stemming from the 1991 war with the former Yugoslavia, high levels of unemployment and resultant feelings of hopelessness, and a culture that views youth alcohol consumption as normal, for example, have made young people especially vulnerable to alcohol abuse. We chose to adapt a program developed by the University of Minnesota's School of Public Health—Project Northland—because it targets all adolescents, not just those in need of chemical dependency treatment."

The strong "no-use" message that forms the basis of Project Northland takes into account the fact that most young people begin drinking as early as their pre-teen years, West said, noting, "Delaying the onset of alcohol use is critical because it is generally a gateway to experimentation with harder drugs."

Making lasting changes in adolescent alcohol use requires the support of the entire community, West continued, saying that the partners worked to address a wide range of social and environmental factors that influence young people's decision to begin drinking using material targeted to specific school grade levels.

The session was moderated by Diane J. Abatemarco, assistant professor of health education and behavioral science at UMDNJ-SPH, who explained that the partners established a city-wide intervention within 13 schools—a feat that could not have been accomplished without the support of the city government and a number of very active community-based organizations in Split.

"Adapting the voluminous curricula and materials to cultural norms in Croatia and getting everything translated was a challenge and we were successful because we followed the principles of cultural sensitivity and competency," acknowledged Abatemarco. "It's also important to note that we learned as much or more than we taught. Croatia is an incredible country of people dedicated to education and prevention. We experienced this with teachers as well as with representatives of the national ministries of Health and Education," she concluded, noting that an article based on their work will be published in the *Journal of Drug Education* later this year.

—by Kathryn Utan, AIHA staff writer



Diane J. Abatemarco and Bernadette West represented AIHA's Split/New Jersey partnership at the conference. (Photo: Kathryn Utan)



Uzbek Community Leaders Share Their Achievements and Make Plans for Future Activities at Tashkent CLDP Follow-up Meeting

Since 2002, AIHA's Community Leadership Development Program (CLDP)—funded by the Open World Leadership Center at the United States Library of Congress—has provided more than 250 Russian civic, healthcare, and political leaders with a first-hand look at how US towns and cities approach community-oriented healthcare delivery. Through short-term professional exchanges focusing on AIHA's "healthy communities" model, participants have greatly increased their capacity to address healthcare challenges and to effect positive change in their home cities through community-based initiatives.

2003 marked the first year the Open World Program was extended to other countries in the former Soviet Union and AIHA had the opportunity to introduce its innovative model to a delegation of 14 healthcare providers from Uzbekistan. During an exchange in December, participants split into three groups based on their professional interests—HIV, TB, and drug abuse prevention and treatment; rural health service delivery; and healthcare management. The groups then traveled separately to Cleveland, Ohio; Des Moines, Iowa; or Lexington, Kentucky, where they learned how each community addresses issues related to their chosen topic.



Oysara Anarkulova, Gulnoz Uzakova, and Oleg Mustafin work on their exchange progress report. (Photo: Alisher Sakhabutdinov.)

Through numerous visits to public hospitals, observation of social service programs, and meetings with representatives of non-profit and governmental organizations, the Uzbek participants were able to gain a deeper understanding of the healthy communities process and strategic planning principles, to experience concrete examples of successful community-based health programs in the United States, and to develop action plans for making concrete, sustainable improvements in their own communities.

The progress of these action plans was discussed at a follow-up meeting convened by AIHA on April 22 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. In addition, the workshop provided an opportunity to update the participants on the programs and healthcare management resources available within Uzbekistan, to encourage collaboration among them and the different agencies represented at the meeting, and to reinforce skills in community-oriented planning approaches and strategies.

Without exception, each group indicated that they achieved the goals established at the orientation meeting they attended in the United States.

For example, Oysara Anarkulova, head of the Administrative Section of the Uzbekistan Republican Center for AIDS Prevention and a representative of the

group that focused on HIV, TB and substance abuse, reported that the exchange participants from Tashkent created a team of 15 professionals to address drug abuse, the spread of HIV and other STIs, and certain social issues concerning commercial sex workers. Notably, this team of health service providers is augmented by police officers. Gulnoz Uzakova, a team member and the director of Uzbekistan Republic DOTS (directly observed treatment short-course) Center, said she used skills and knowledge acquired during the exchange to improve DOTS administration in Tashkent's regional and district hospitals and polyclinics. Oleg Mustafin, staff executive of the Tashkent City Substance Abuse Treatment Center, highlighted the team's progress with introducing replacement therapy to treat drug addicts and its efforts to prevent HIV in high-risk population.

Tamara Ismatova, head nurse of Emergency Medical Services for the Andizhan Region in Eastern Uzbekistan, observed rural healthcare service delivery programs during her visit to the United States. She reported how she was applying what she learned about nursing leadership and teaching methods in Des Moines to her efforts to establish a Nursing Training Center in her home city of Andizhan. Ismatova taught the first in a series of nursing leadership courses to chief nurses from all Andizhan city districts and two of her colleagues from rural clinics in Fergana also spoke about the nurse training they provided after they return from the exchange. All three noted that additional professional training encourages nurses to be more independent and proactive, particularly with regard to patient management, which helps improve the overall quality of medical services.

Talking of what the third group has accomplished, Nuriya Tureyeva, an official from the Karakalpakstan Republic Ministry of Public Health (MPH) in the northwest part of the country pointed out that the exchange was useful in terms of learning about health services management and organization in the United States. She worked together with colleagues on the MPH Maternity and Child Healthcare Committee to implement changes in in-patient services for women and children. As a result, the Ministry has decided to reduce underused bed capacity in pediatric hospitals to free up funds and upgrade equipment and patient conveniences.



Yerkinoy Mirzaalimova (standing), head of the Shark Yuludzhi Rural Medical Unit in Fergana Oblast, does a presentation on the group's achievements after their return from Des Moines while her colleagues

After the participants concluded their reports, Regional Open World Project Coordinator Alisher Sakhabutdinov gave a presentation on information resources available for healthcare providers to enhance their programs, such as the materials posted through the Open World alumni interactive forum. He also informed them of future Open World exchange trips to the United States that are available for healthcare providers from Uzbekistan.

Pastki-Muyan Rural Medical Unit, Fergana Oblast, and Tamara Ismatova look on. (Photo: Alisher Sakhabutdinov.)

Two workshop participants came from the First and Second Tashkent State Medical Institutes, representing AIHA's Tashkent/Lexington partnership, which focuses on health management. Their US counterpart—the University of Kentucky School of Public Health—was one of the host organizations for the December exchange program. They provided an overview of the health management education reforms in Uzbekistan initiated by AIHA partners and briefed attendees about a future series of short-term health services management courses in which the majority of CLDP graduates expressed the desire to enroll.

Fran Jaeger, AIHA's program officer for Central Asia, provided a brief overview of the other AIHA-sponsored programs in Uzbekistan, including the new regional partnership for nursing education and leadership development. She also made a presentation on the "healthy communities" concept designed to orient participants to effective planning approaches and ensure that health programs are both community-oriented and responsive to the needs of those they serve.

In addition, participants took part in several interactive discussions during which they talked about how the various methods of implementing change apply to their particular settings and brainstormed about ways of motivating their colleagues to achieve improved performance.

"The meeting provided evidence that the delegates have met the goals set prior to visiting their respective sites in the United States," Jaeger explains, noting that surveys completed by participants at the conclusion of the meeting demonstrated that the Open World Program is perceived as a highly valuable tool for expanding visions, improving professional outlooks, and enhancing leadership capabilities.

Even though many delegates reported financial and bureaucratic challenges, they reaffirmed their commitment to act as catalysts for positive change in the own communities. "Resources are limited, but our creativity is unlimited," aptly stated one of the workshop participants, voicing a sentiment shared by the rest of her colleagues.

Regional News

Global Fund Grant Will Help Russia Combat Its Growing HIV/AIDS Crisis

In an effort to help Russia curb its rapidly exploding HIV/AIDS epidemic, the [Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria](#) has approved a five-year, \$34.6-million grant that will fund prevention and treatment programs targeting HIV/AIDS.

U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson, announced the grant in Moscow on July 1, according to *U.N. Wire*. Thompson, who also serves as Global Fund's chairman noted that the award stipulates approximately 5,000 Russians living with HIV/AIDS receive access to antiretroviral therapy during the first year of project implementation, while some 75,000 will be treated within the next five years.

Russia's skyrocketing rate of new HIV infections can be traced back to the mid-1990s, a period characterized by political and economic instability following the collapse of the former Soviet Union. During this time, sharp increases in drug trafficking led to rampant injecting drug use. This, in turn, stimulated rapid spread of the infection among drug users, who, until recently, remained the group most vulnerable to HIV. According to *U.N. Wire*, however, the latest statistics indicate that the virus is no longer the sole burden of high-risk groups; it is carving its way into the general population. So far, 283,000 cases of HIV/AIDS have been officially registered in Russia, but experts believe the country is home to two million people living with the disease.

While in Moscow, Thompson met with Russian Minister of Health Mikhail Zurabov to discuss a strategy for reducing the price of triple-drug therapy to less than \$1,000 per person each year. Currently, the antiretroviral cocktail can cost as much as \$15,000 per person annually.

Using Football to Fight HIV/AIDS and Drug Abuse in Kyrgyzstan

The Kyrgyz Football Federation (KFF) and the United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF) recently launched an innovative project to fight HIV/AIDS and drug use in Kyrgyzstan. Taking advantage of the country's well-developed network of football clubs as well as the respect teens generally give to the opinions of coaches and team officials—KFF and UNICEF decided to use these esteemed authority figures to send positive messages about AIDS prevention to young people, reports *IRIN*.

The central idea of the project is to educate coaches not only about HIV/AIDS and drug abuse prevention, but also to train them to become educators capable of effectively passing along important health messages to younger generations through informal seminars for children who attend soccer classes. The children, in turn, will educate their peers and friends.

"There's so much ignorance out there about the dangers of AIDS and drugs," Alexander Ageev, deputy head of KFF, told *IRIN*. "We estimate that our project will have an impact on about 100,000 young people across Kyrgyzstan."

The idea to create such a program was prompted by the recent rapid spread of HIV infection in Kyrgyzstan, mainly among young male drug addicts. In 2003 alone, the number of newly registered HIV cases was 470, but experts believe

that the real figure is as much as 10 times higher, according to UNICEF. With the number of drug users already topping 55,000 and continuing to grow thanks to rampant heroin trafficking from neighboring Afghanistan, the situation is poised to worsen, *IRIN* reports.

Since the launch of the program in March 2004, UNICEF has already conducted two seminars for 60 of the country's estimated 400 football coaches and is planning to do more later this year. According to Ageev, initially some coaches were skeptical; they thought they already knew everything about HIV/AIDS and drugs. "But, after two days of training the very same people came to me to say how much they had learned that they could now share with the kids from their teams," he explained.

Workshops, Conferences, Opportunities and Grants

Congress of the European Society of Cardiology

Given the growing global epidemic of diabetes, the European Society of Cardiology's 2004 Congress will focus on "The Heart and Diabetes," a topic which imposes new challenges on the medical community as a whole—and cardiovascular specialists in particular—because many patients with diabetes also suffer from heart problems. The Congress will take place August 28-September 1, 2004 in Munich, Germany. For more information, see:

www.escardio.org/congresses/esc_congress_2004/

4th European Conference: Perspectives in Breast Cancer

The Spanish Society of Medical Oncology will hold its 4th European Conference on Perspectives in Breast Cancer. The event—which will focus on issues of counseling, prevention, screening and detection, staging, therapy, and breast cancer surgery—will take place September 23-25, 2004, in Madrid, Spain. For more information, please visit:

www.imedex.com/announcements/ebreast04.html#info

World Congress of Psychophysiology: The Olympics of the Brain

The International Organization of Psychophysiology, which is associated with the United Nations, will conduct its 12th World Congress of Psychophysiology. The event will be held September 18-23, 2004 in Thessaloniki, Chalkidiki, Greece. For additional information, see: www.iop-world.org/iop2004

Features

Corvallis Partners Receive Award for Healthcare Reform in the Transcarpathian Region, Praise from their Ukrainian Counterparts

established within AIHA's Uzhgorod/Corvallis partnership at Uzhgorod State University heard that his American colleagues from Corvallis had won Sister Cities International's Innovation Award for Healthcare for their work in the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine, he says he was not at all surprised. "Our partners from Corvallis are truly unsurpassed as leaders, in their inventiveness, and how they take the initiative. They are an inexhaustible source of ideas and projects," he says with pride, stressing that the majority of these projects have already earned recognition and been applied throughout the Transcarpathian Region.



An international family of American and Ukrainian partners pose for a group photo . (Photo courtesy of Bohdaniya Mykyta.)

Bohdaniya Mykyta, head physician at the Velykoberezhnyansky Central Regional Hospital where the partners created a second Family Medicine Center, agrees. "We are happy that our partners received this award. They earned it with their selfless labor, faith in our capabilities, and concern for the health of people in Ukraine." Mykyta says that since Uzhgorod's collaboration with the Corvallis Sister Cities Association began in 1999, the healthcare workers and residents of the community of Velyky Berezhny have experienced many positive emotions and changes for the better—and not only with respect to technical

improvements in healthcare in the region.

In Bohdaniya Stanislavovna's view, the partners have done an enormous amount, first and foremost, to change the attitude of healthcare professionals and the local population toward family medicine and disease prevention. Before the partnership was established, primary care in the region used to be provided by district doctors and pediatricians who would send patients to specialists based on problems as they surfaced. This "wait and see" approach failed to take into account the overall health of a patient, virtually ignoring the role hereditary, family medical history, and unhealthy lifestyle habits play in a person's wellbeing. This approach overlooked important disease prevention or early detection strategies and, in most cases, patients only sought care when their condition was already in an advanced stage.



Celebrating World Anti-tobacco Day: Velyky Berezhny school children participate in a drawing contest, "Youth against smoking," that was initiated by the partnership. (Photo: Bohdaniya Mykyta.)

"The opening of the Family Medicine Center in 2000 brought about a radical change," Mykyta says. "Thanks to our partners, six doctors and 17 nurses from the Center's staff traveled to the United States for training that helped them earn certification in family medicine from Uzhgorod State University. Now the doctors and nurses care for entire families, from birth to the last days of their lives." Mykyta notes that this continuity has improved the quality of healthcare. Patient satisfaction has also improved, and more people are coming to the Center for

preventive advice and check-ups. "Approximately 40 percent of our patients come in for regular screenings and check-ups as opposed only 10 percent a few years ago," Mykyta emphasizes.



Ivan Chohey speaks at the opening of a dental clinic established by the partnership at the Uzhgorod FMTC. (Photo: Vira Illiash.)

Chohey says that he also believes the adoption of the family medicine approach has been all for the good, for doctors and patients alike. "When our partnership was just getting started, none of us believed that a family physician could care for an entire family. We were accustomed to using specialists. But as we worked side-by-side with our partners, we were convinced that the family medicine approach is valid, above all because it focuses not only on the patient's illnesses, but also on the patient as a person, his environment, and the various factors that are components of an individual's health. We realized that this was just what was needed," he says with a smile, explaining that he himself, until recently, was a specialist in what is a rare field in Ukraine. He was a perinatalist and gastroenterologist, but

now he has retrained as a family physician because he believes in family medicine and thinks that's where the future lies.

Since opening, the FMTC has trained approximately 200 family physicians in the Transcarpathian Region. "Now we have reached a critical mass of specialists who recognize the need for family medicine reform and will work to advance it despite significant interference from official agencies," Chohey says. "More recently, though, they, too, have changed their attitude. They are coming to understand that family medicine brings changes for the better," he explains.

The Ukrainian partners point to many other accomplishments stemming from their partnership with Corvallis, even though only five years have passed since its initiation. In 2000, a Women's Health Center was opened in Uzhgorod to provide the "better half" of the human race with a full spectrum of healthcare services ranging from breast health programs and screening for sexually transmitted infections to gynecological oncology services and healthy lifestyle education courses.



Bohdaniya Mykyta tells teachers from Velyky Berezny about the importance of promoting healthy lifestyle choices for children, explaining the value of disease prevention. (Photo: Oleg Dobosh.)

Quite recently, several dental offices were opened at the university FMTC and at Velykobereznyansky Central Regional Hospital.

They provide dental care not only to the local population, but also to schoolchildren and children with special needs. Because medical research shows that healthy teeth contribute to overall wellness, the partners are looking out for the health of the younger generation through the creation of an educational preventive care program that teaches schoolchildren how to brush their teeth correctly and maintain good oral hygiene. The children use fluoridated

mouthwash, which protects against dental caries.

The partnership has helped bring other programs to the region, as well. Now operational, they likewise have to do with improving the health of the population, but again with special attention to youth. One of them, a program on healthy lifestyles, was designed on the basis of a survey of schoolchildren. After determining that adolescents' main problems were smoking tobacco, alcohol consumption, and a lack of sex education, the partners developed a series of lectures called health classes, which are given for local schoolchildren by family doctors or feldshers at their outpatient clinics. Starting in 2001, these classes became so popular with adolescents that they were officially adopted by all 32 of the secondary schools in Velyky Berezny.



Students from Velyky Berezny promote a tobacco-free environment, using posters and leaflets to spread their anti-smoking message. (Photo: Bohdaniya Mykyta.)

Mykyta says that this initiative has had very good results. A follow-up survey at one of the Velyky Berezny secondary schools showed that approximately 60 percent of young smokers had quit this harmful habit after participating in the health classes. In addition, the partners helped set up a special smoke-free high school where none of the students smoke. "We were pleased with the results of a monitoring survey done at that school," reports Mykyta with satisfaction, noting that the American and Ukrainian partners have instituted other programs in the region too numerous to list but, in view of the strong emphasis partners have placed on the promotion of healthy lifestyles, she points one more that has been especially effective.



Peer educators host a healthy lifestyles game show at one of the secondary schools in Velyky Berezny. (Photo: Bohdaniya Mykyta.)

In this program, schoolchildren teach their peers, but instead of sophisticated scientific topics, they teach simple facts of life that every young person should know—how to protect oneself from AIDS, why smoking is so harmful, or the dangerous effects alcohol can have on a person's growth and development, for example. The students present this information to their classmates using dramatic skits as a way of conveying accurate information on the pitfalls of adopting unhealthy lifestyle habits.

It is clear from the partners' stories that it was possible to accomplish so much in such a short time only because of the tremendous desire and capabilities of the people working in the partnership, as well as their friendship and solidarity in the pursuit of common goals. In addition, Mykyta points out that, of course, leadership plays an important role in the success of any undertaking. And, the Ukrainians unanimously recognize partnership coordinator Louise Muscato as a dedicated leader.

"She has put everything she has, heart and soul, into our partnership," Bohdaniya Stanislavovna says gratefully. "Louise has done a great amount of work with us. It is thanks to her limitless enthusiasm and persistence that our doctors and nurses have grasped the need to protect people's health from childhood on. She and her colleagues made it possible for us to revise our attitudes toward healthcare and disease prevention, so that now we are doing everything we can to make sure that the next generation in the Transcarpathian Region grows up healthy and happy, and that the philosophy the Americans have given us is passed on from generation to generation."



US partnership coordinator Louise Muscato (second from left) with community members from Velyky Berezny. (Photo: Bohdaniya Mykyta.)

Unfortunately, the Ukrainian partners will not be able to attend the awards ceremony, which will take place July 17 at the Sister Cities International Annual Conference, in Fort Worth, Texas. But they say they will remember their American friends with extra-special feeling on that day and will support them with their thoughts and heartfelt congratulations.

Having Gained Longstanding Appreciation of Patients, Svetlana Posokhova Receives Title of Honored Doctor of Ukraine

People trust this woman with their deepest secrets. Sometimes she doesn't have a chance to shut her eyes for days on end and her legs are on the verge of giving way from fatigue. Nonetheless, she works with precision and confidence, her face a study of concentration until the heart-gripping "Waa-aaa!" sounds out—the announcement of that great mystery, the birth of a new life. Then her face breaks into a happy smile, her fatigue melts away, and her heart again beats evenly and calmly. She leaves the delivery room, taking off her scrubs as she goes, and with a smile of satisfaction says, "What a miracle that really is, a baby's first cry!"



Svetlana Posokhova (Photo:)

Svetlana Posokhova has been working as an obstetrician/gynecologist for some 27 years. Her many titles include deputy chief Ob/Gyn physician at the Odessa Oblast Hospital (OOH), head of the Odessa Women's Health Center, and director of the South Ukrainian AIDS Education Center—these last two facilities were opened under the auspices of AIHA—but these monikers are not the reason for her fame. She has earned the recognition of thousands of patients thanks to her humanity, kindness, and talent as a physician. For many people, she is unforgettable. Whole families come to visit her or call her on holidays; some even publish newspaper advertisements to announce their feelings of gratitude and affection to this dedicated woman and skilled practitioner. That's where Posokhova found out that, on May 12, she had been awarded yet another title—Honored Doctor of Ukraine—by Presidential decree.

Vira Illiash)

Posokhova honed her professionalism in Russia's Far North, in a small village in the Khanty-Mansi District, where she was the only Ob/Gyn within 500 kilometers. She arrived there when she was only 22 years old. Upon graduating with honors from the Chernovtsy State Medical Institute, she could have gotten a good assignment and stayed in Ukraine, but she confesses she was looking for "something romantic." She decided to do her internship in Sverdlovsk—now Yekaterinburg—in Russia's Ural Mountains then moved on to Salym, a small settlement in the oil fields of the Far North region. "I went there on special assignment because the community hospital did not have an Ob/Gyn at that time, but a lot of babies were being born. The trip stretched into an entire year," Posokhova recounts. "There was no one to replace me and, if I had left, they wouldn't have had a doctor at all!" she exclaims.

Recalling the difficult living conditions in those days, Posokhova explains, "It was 1978, a time of hunger. We had absolutely nothing to eat because there was nothing in the stores. Just once a month, we were given a ration of saiga meat, which was fairly tough and not very tasty. So, bread with mayonnaise and green peas were the mainstay of our diet," she says. "The local hospital had no diagnostic equipment or even basic medicines. If a pregnant woman experienced some pathology, I would call in a helicopter and take her to the regional center."

Posokhova describes how she sometimes also had to get to her patients on her own two feet. "The local people, the Khanty, give birth at home in their yurts. I remember once a Khanty man came to me on skis to report that his wife had given birth, but the placenta had failed to pass. I skied with him five kilometers through the snow to where they lived. I have a very strong recollection of that visit," says Posokhova. "This was the twelfth child in the family, and all of those children were in the yurt while I was operating on their mother. She was in very serious condition and I had to act fast to save her life. I washed my hands with iodine and removed the placenta without an anesthetic. When they understood that their mother was going to be alright, the children were tremendously happy and thanked me with all their hearts!"

There is another case that Posokhova will always remember. "This was in Sverdlovsk during the Spartakiade of the Peoples of the USSR, which is like a regional Olympiad. I was on duty the day that Galina Kulakova—a world ski champion several times over—was admitted to the obstetrics and gynecology department. Still an intern, I diagnosed her problem and performed the

necessary surgery. And, three days after that operation, she put her skis on and won the Spartakiade. She gave me a thank-you present, an autographed photograph of herself wearing her medals. I still have it," recalls Posokhova with feeling.

Posokhova has many stories like that and, when she tells them—genuine emotion clearly evident in her voice and on her face—it is easy to see both how much this woman loves people and how lucky her patients are to have such a caring and dedicated physician at their sides. Whoever might be in her care, whomever she might be helping, she remembers their names, their stories, and their gratitude.

Perhaps it was providence that brought this daring, brilliant specialist to Odessa around the same time the first case of HIV was registered in the port city on Ukraine's Black Sea coast. That was in 1987 and, since then Posokhova has been caring for HIV-infected women, their children, and their families. Through her efforts, OOH became the first healthcare institution in Ukraine to reduce mother-to-child transmission of the virus by 75 percent over the course of a two-year period.

"We are very proud of our collaboration and friendship with Svetlana," AIHA Executive Director James P. Smith said in a congratulatory speech on the occasion of Posokhova's award as Honored Physician of Ukraine. "Thanks to her persistence and leadership, our joint efforts—especially with the Odessa Center of Excellence for Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV and Southern Ukraine AIDS Education Center—have been very successful and are now recognized leaders on vertical transmission prevention in the countries of the former Soviet Union. We congratulate Svetlana with all our hearts and wish her new professional achievements. We look forward to years of continued fruitful collaboration with her."

—Unless otherwise noted, all stories in this issue were written by AIHA Staff Writer Vira Illiash who is based in Kiev, Ukraine.