

Strengthening Ukraine's Ability to Provide Antiretroviral Therapy to PLWHA: The Regional Knowledge Hub's Strategy to Build Human Resource Capacity for Rapid Scale Up of Treatment

Olga Kostyuk¹, Alla Scherbinska², Svetlana Antoniak³, Zoya Shabarova⁴

¹Regional Knowledge Hub for the Care and Treatment of HIV/AIDS in Eurasia, ²Ukrainian National AIDS Center, ³Gromashevsky Research Institute of Epidemiology and Infectious Diseases, ⁴American International Health Alliance

ISSUES

Ukraine—with an estimated adult HIV prevalence rate of 1.4%—is the country worst affected by the AIDS epidemic in Europe.¹ In July 2004, fewer than 200 of those who required ART received it.² Expectations of increased funding from international donor sources to purchase ARVs that same year prompted the Ukrainian Ministry of Health and the Ukrainian National AIDS Center to move forward with a plan to rapidly roll out ART services across the country.

The plan, which was endorsed by the Ukrainian Ministry of Health with input from oblasts, relevant NGOs, and international organizations, identified three factors integral to efforts to aggressively scale-up ART services in the country:

- training and professional development of healthcare workers;
- organization of an effective care model that would support patients and result in a high degree of therapy adherence among them; and
- increased availability of antiretroviral drugs, laboratory capacity, and other critical resources and supplies.

Launched in 2004, this plan³ designates oblast or city AIDS centers as the entry point for ART services. In its first phase, the plan focused on scaling up ART services in Kiev and five oblasts with the highest concentrations of HIV/AIDS patients. These services would then be extended nationwide through two subsequent expansions (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Oblasts Targeted in the First, Second, and Third Phases of a National Plan for Scaling up ART Services in Ukraine

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Regional Knowledge Hub for the Care and Treatment of HIV/AIDS in Eurasia is a unique network of individual experts and stakeholder organizations in HIV medicine that serves as a key capacity building mechanism for the region's ART scale-up strategy. Established by WHO and the American International Health Alliance (AIHA) with funding from the German Society for Technical Cooperation's BACKUP Initiative⁴ and other donors, the Knowledge Hub helps build the human and organizational capacity necessary to provide high-quality care to PLWHA in Ukraine and other the nations of the former Soviet Union.

Since January 2004, the Knowledge Hub has worked with the government and other stakeholders to formulate Ukraine's national ART plan and implement the related workforce training program. This poster discusses the results of an implementation review analyzing the Knowledge Hub's human capacity-building efforts in Ukraine from January 2004-June 2006.

As of June 1, 2006, the Knowledge Hub has conducted 36 skills-based trainings on key HIV/AIDS topics for 888 Ukrainian clinicians and allied health professionals from oblast and city AIDS centers, infectious disease hospitals, penitentiary system clinics, and HIV/AIDS NGOs in 23 oblasts and the cities of Kiev and Sevastopol (see Figure 2). Implementation of the trainings is funded

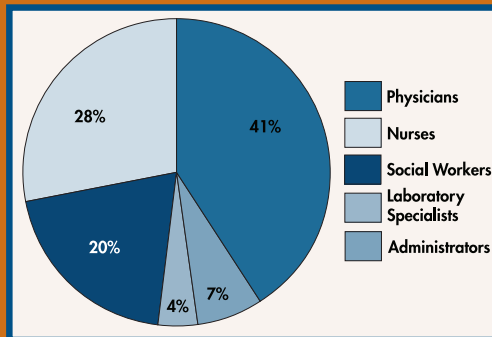


Figure 2: Ukrainian Knowledge Hub Trainees by Profession

through the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria's program "Overcoming HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Ukraine" and by UNICEF/Ukraine. Care teams trained by the Knowledge Hub are managing ART for more than 3,424 Ukrainian HIV/AIDS patients (as of June 1, 2006).

Training Methodology and Approach

The Knowledge Hub currently offers 23 different courses on HIV/AIDS-related treatment and care. For each course, Knowledge Hub staff recruit an appropriate multidisciplinary team of international and national experts who possess a proven combination of clinical practice experience and adult education/training skills. Key national stakeholders select the Ukrainian caregivers to be trained.

The following principles guide the Knowledge Hub's capacity building efforts:

- Stress a multidisciplinary approach that promotes cooperation between healthcare workers and relevant NGOs to better address HIV prevention and comprehensive treatment, care, and support;
- Support national HIV/AIDS strategy and national training needs;
- Base curricula and training materials on relevant national regulations, WHO recommendations, and international best practices;
- Combine theoretical lessons with hands-on, interactive skills-building sessions;
- Conduct trainings at affiliated clinical sites with well-equipped classrooms for didactic components and patient access for practical sessions;
- Keep class size small to maximize opportunities for interaction among instructors, patients, and other trainees;
- Test the knowledge and skills of trainees before and after each course, using the results to fine tune subsequent trainings; and
- Optimize scarce resources by tracking trainee participation in courses to ensure that each individual's professional development is part of the country's broader human capacity development strategy.

National Certification

Certification to assure professional competence and quality of care is critically important. The Knowledge Hub and the National Medical Academy of Postgraduate Education have developed a national certification process for physicians in both adult and pediatric HIV medicine in Ukraine. As of July 1, 2006, 106 physicians have earned certification through this process.

LESSONS LEARNED

Key elements contributing to the Knowledge Hub's success include: cooperation among stakeholders; adopting a multidisciplinary care team approach; proven training methodology; and continuous monitoring and evaluation of programs. While there are many ways to measure the effectiveness of a training regimen, the trainees themselves are the most important evidence of the Knowledge Hub's success. Knowledge assessments attest to the quality of the courses. On average, participants increased their scores by at least 10 percentage points; for some courses the increase was closer to 30 or 40 percent.

Programmatic Strengths

Clear programmatic imperative to build HIV/AIDS-related capacity in a manner that is aligned with national ART strategy

Multidisciplinary team approach teaches clinicians and other care providers how to maximize the contributions of each member to improve scope and quality of available services through a continuum of HIV/AIDS care and treatment

Careful mix of didactic sessions, clinical exercises, case studies, and professional mentoring—coupled with the high level of faculty expertise—help ensure that trainees master course material

Implementation Challenges

Vertical Structure of national AIDS care system inhibits collaboration among specialists, including those working in tuberculosis and substance abuse treatment

Enormous and inadequately documented treatment, care, and support needs of PLWHA who are often members of vulnerable groups such as IDUs, CSWs, and MSMs

Lack of national training capacity in the form of HIV/AIDS specialists qualified to train others in the knowledge and skills needed to provide comprehensive care, including ART, to PLWHA

Figure 3: The Knowledge Hub's Capacity Building Strategy in Ukraine: Program Strengths and Challenges

Since its inception, the Knowledge Hub has documented a number of programmatic strengths—as well as several barriers to achieving training goals. This information emerged from careful analysis of periodic faculty reports and surveys of participant feedback (see Figure 3, above).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The educational model used by the Knowledge Hub has proven effective for coordinating and strengthening Ukraine's national response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, in particular building the human resource capacity necessary to provide universal access to ART. The lessons learned in Ukraine are already being applied to other countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and can be readily adapted to resource-constrained nations outside the region. Based on the Knowledge Hub's achievements in Ukraine, the following recommendations will guide its future work:

- **Provide ongoing opportunities for advanced training**—refresher courses should be provided on a regular basis to ensure that members of the care teams stay abreast of the latest evidence-based developments in HIV/AIDS care. Preceptorships, twinning partnerships, and other training methods should be explored.
- **Nurture distinct professional roles among team members**—courses should stress the need for a common approach to HIV/AIDS care while at the same time underscoring the unique role each member of the care team plays. Professional empowerment and mutual understanding will boost provider confidence in their ability to perform their respective roles.
- **Broaden the skill set of team members**—HIV/AIDS necessitates access to a continuum of care throughout a patient's lifetime. To help ensure PLWHA have access to the best care possible, specialists need more opportunities to explore topics such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS co-infection, narcology, palliative care, mental health, social support, and case management.

References

1. WHO. AIDS Epidemic Update 2005, p 49 (December 2005).
2. WHO. Progress on Global Access to HIV Antiretroviral Therapy: A report on "3 by 5" and Beyond, p 38 (March 2006).
3. International HIV/AIDS Alliance/Ukraine. Scaling Up ARV Treatment in Ukraine. Brief Overview. Draft. (August 2004).
4. BACKUP Initiative; www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/en-backup-flyer-june04.pdf

www.aidsknowledgehub.org

