

# Expanding the Role of Nurses in HIV/AIDS Treatment and Care to Improve Patient Retention: Lessons from Russia's Orenburg Oblast AIDS Center

Sergey Mikhaylov<sup>1</sup>, Elmira Vagapova<sup>1</sup>, Tatiana Zabyrova<sup>2</sup>,  
Jacqueline Stiith<sup>3</sup>, Neil Landreville<sup>3</sup>, Judith Garcia<sup>3</sup>, Kathleen Higgins<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Orenburg Oblast AIDS Center, Orenburg, Russia; <sup>2</sup>American International Health Alliance, Orenburg, Russia;  
<sup>3</sup>Elmhurst Hospital Center, Elmhurst, New York, and Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, New York, New York

## ISSUES

Russian nurses have traditionally been relegated to administrative and even janitorial roles. They have performed very little of the patient support services—intake, counseling, and health education—that are considered core duties of the nursing profession in much of the world. In most cases, that has meant that patients haven't had access to these services. This underutilization of nursing staff can therefore be directly linked to low rates of patient retention in care.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

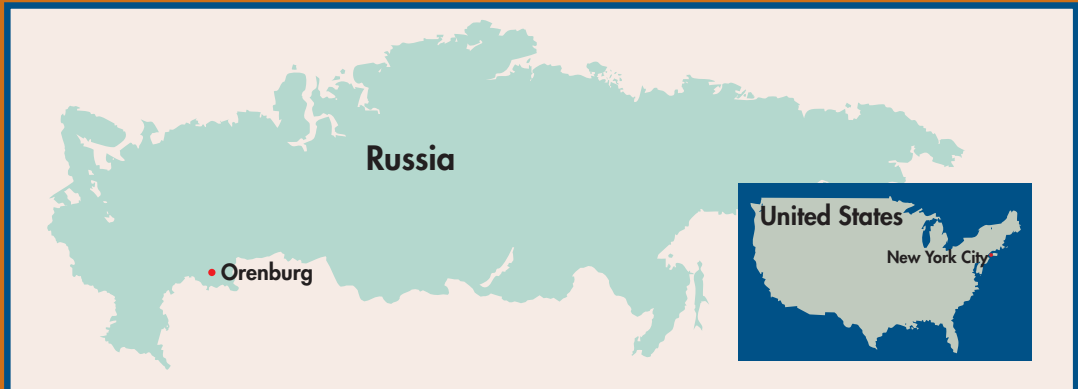
In July 2004, the Elmhurst Hospital Center's Infectious Diseases Clinic in New York City and the Orenburg Oblast AIDS Center in Russia began working together as part of a USAID-funded HIV/AIDS project coordinated by the American International Health Alliance and University Research Co., LLC.

Exchange visits for training and technical assistance between Orenburg AIDS Center staff and Elmhurst Hospital staff were conducted. Russian health administrators and physicians observed Elmhurst's nurse-social worker intake clinic, where HIV/AIDS patients first meet with a nurse and social worker to ascertain their individual condition and needs prior to meeting with a doctor. This comprehensive, cost-effective model—along with the team approach to care used at Elmhurst—has helped the hospital achieve a patient retention rate of 88%.

Adopting a train-the-trainers approach, the New York nurses worked hand-in-hand with their Russian peers, demonstrating the important role nurses and social workers play in patient care. Through direct observation, practical clinical training, and in-depth case studies, the Russian nurses expanded their knowledge of HIV disease, its effects on the immune system, and its modes of transmission. They also learned key elements of the patient interview and



Orenburg nurses learn about the patient intake process during a partnership exchange.



needs assessment process, including screening for substance abuse, mental health issues, and problems requiring social support.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Orenburg medical providers and administrators were shown that the more time nurses spend interacting with HIV/AIDS patients, the better they can assist with day-to-day problems. This close interaction and the resulting bond formed between nurses and patients helps reduce barriers to care and increase treatment compliance.

Orenburg nurses and physicians began to collaborate more closely and instituted a train-the-trainer program at the AIDS Center. The Russian nurses are now actively involved in patient consultations and continue to receive in-depth training at Elmhurst Hospital's nurse-social worker intake clinic. The Orenburg nurses report that they spend more time with patients and that their duties now include patient education and outreach, as well as medication management.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

US models of nursing care for PLWHA proven to increase client retention can be adapted and successfully implemented in Russia. It is recommended that this model be implemented throughout Russia as more PLWHA begin receiving ART.

To facilitate ongoing development and program success:

- Orenburg AIDS Clinic should continue to use Elmhurst Hospital as a resource for expanding the role of nurses at the clinic;
- Nurses should receive ongoing training to ensure they have the skills necessary to retain patients in care;



Orenburg nurse Elena Gutareva has eagerly and adeptly taken on a new and expanded role in the AIDS Center's VCT unit.



Through the AIHA partnership, US and Russian nurses work together to elevate nursing as a profession at the Orenburg AIDS Center. Shown here are American nurses Judith Garcia (front left) and Jacqueline Stiith (front right) with the AIDS Center's head nurse Elmira Vagapova and her staff.

- Continued focus on teamwork and addressing patient care in a holistic manner should be stressed;
- Project outcomes and successes should be tracked and analyzed; and
- Elmhurst clinicians should continue to assist their colleagues in Orenburg through ongoing communication after the partnership is concluded.

