

Giving a Mother the Tools to Cope with Her Child's Asthma

As 4-year-old Iliyas laughingly helps his older sister chop vegetables for a salad—part of their father's birthday dinner—it's hard to believe that a few short years ago he was barely able to breathe. Plagued with respiratory problems less than one year after he was born, Iliyas was diagnosed with severe asthma when he was 18 months old. "I had taken him to other doctors who had used antibiotics to treat him. . . . They told me he had bronchitis one time, pneumonia the next," says his mother, Zamira. "His condition was so bad that I was truly on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Finally, a friend suggested that I take Iliyas to the pulmonology department at the Republican Institute for Pediatrics and Children's Surgery." It was there that Zamira was told her son suffered from asthma.



PHOTO: PAVEL GUIVAEV

"My husband and I really didn't know anything about the disease at that time. In fact, we thought it was a terminal condition at first and were in a state of shock before our new doctor explained various ways of preventing attacks and easing them when they did occur." Their doctor—Munira Baizhanova—is the chief pediatric pulmonologist at the Ministry of Health of Kazakhstan and chairperson of the pulmonology department at the Institute. After the initial diagnosis, Baizhanova put Iliyas on a systematic treatment and prevention

program using a steroid nebulizer and explained to the young boy's parents what they could do to help manage his condition.

"I feel as though she was bestowed upon us by God," Zamira says of Baizhanova. "She is both a physician and a psychotherapist to us. She makes herself available any time, day or night, and has taught us ways to prevent Iliyas from wheezing by ensuring he follows an appropriate diet and controlling environmental conditions in our home." Still, according to Zamira, the worst thing about asthma is the insidious nature of the disease. "It's a very unpredictable thing—an attack can start in an instant and, after weeks of peace, Iliyas can have a relapse, but the professionals at the Institute have helped us learn emergency care. . . . after many sleepless nights spent in the hos-



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With his asthma now under control, 4-year-old Iliyas—sitting with his mother Zamira and riding his new tricycle around his family's Almaty home—is able to lead a normal, active life.

pital with my son, believe me, I've become a quick study," she says with a wry smile.

Convinced that her life would be far from normal had Iliyas not received treatment at the Institute, Zamira notes that she and her husband have become staunch advocates of patient education and stress the importance of finding encouragement from other families who are going through similar situations. "I feel so strongly about this treatment program that I joined a community board and actively promote the Institute whenever I get the chance. Other parents often call me

Many nations throughout the NIS and CEE have experienced a marked increase in cases of asthma over the past decade due, in part, to escalating rates of air pollution and tobacco use. Changing the mindset of patients suffering from the condition—and many of the healthcare practitioners who treat them—was one of the goals of the Almaty, Kazakhstan/Tucson, Arizona, partnership. Educating young patients and their families to adopt an aggressive approach to treatment and prevention by using Western protocols and incorporating lifestyle changes geared to reduce attacks are the mainstays of a program that resulted from the efforts of the partners. Based at the Republican Institute for Pediatrics and Children's Surgery, this "Asthma School" has significantly reduced asthma-related hospitalizations by training parents and children to better manage the disease. This is the story of one mother's struggle to cope with her son's asthma; the story of the doctor who helped them appears on the other side.

when they have questions about managing their children's asthma and we are working to create a support group."

Iliyas, for his part, is happy to go about the business of being a cheerful and rambunctious child now that his asthma is under control, Zamira says. "He likes to read and draw and play with his toys. . . and, like many little boys his age, dreams of being an astronaut or maybe even a race car driver. He can be anything he wants, thanks, in part, to the systematic approaches to both treatment and prevention we have learned from the staff at the Center—this information has been our salvation because asthma only gets worse if it is ignored."

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