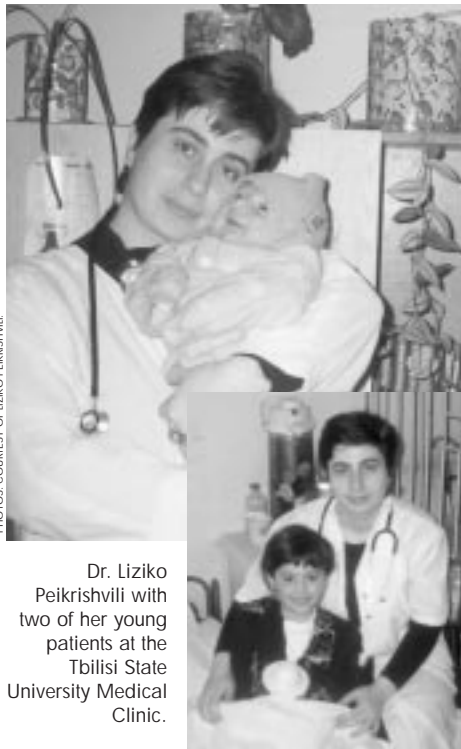


Emergency Medical Training Helps Pediatrician Save a Young Life

It wasn't really necessary for Liziko Peikrishvili to take an emergency medicine course at the Tbilisi EMS Training Center in 1997. The 31-year-old pediatric hematologist just wanted to acquire some new skills that might prove useful one day. "Of course, we are taught life-saving techniques in medical school, but the instruction there is mostly theoretical. The courses at



Dr. Liziko Peikrishvili with two of her young patients at the Tbilisi State University Medical Clinic.

the EMS Training Center supplement the latest theories and methods with a great deal of hands-on experience using both adult- and infant-sized mannequins, as well as a wide variety of simulation exercises," Peikrishvili explains, noting that she was able to repeat these practical applications until she became comfortable with her new-found knowledge.

"After the course, I felt confident that I had learned important new skills . . . and that I would be able to apply these skills effectively in crisis situations," she states. As it turned out, she was soon put to the test when an 8-month-old boy went into

cardiac arrest at the Tbilisi State Medical University Clinic where Peikrishvili works.

"Ermine was very ill when his mother, Eliso, brought him to our hospital," she says, explaining that the woman and her family were internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Abkhazia and had been living about 30 minutes away from Tbilisi at an IDP settlement in Marneuli Military District #1. "It is such an unhealthy atmosphere and the people there are so poor. The baby had a number of serious ailments ranging from severe iron-deficiency anemia to bronchial problems and a urinary tract infection—all brought on or exacerbated by poor nutrition."

In the course of diagnosing Ermine's maladies, the physicians ordered several common tests—one of which uses colored dye to determine the exact nature of the urinary tract infection, according to Peikrishvili, who notes that this test can cause an adverse reaction in the heart—sometimes immediately, sometimes within a day or two. "I was on rounds when one of the nurses called to me. She had been giving the baby a routine blood transfusion and said she did not like the color of his skin. Ermine was very pale when I entered the room and I could see that he had stopped breathing," she explains. "I checked his heart and found that it was beating, but very weakly. . . . This was the first time I was alone with a dying person and I was a bit frightened, of course, but my training helped me overcome the fear. I performed CPR for about three or four minutes—although it seemed like an eternity—and I prayed that I would be able to get his breathing started again. All the while, I could hear the young boy's mother crying and pleading with me to save her son's life."

Peikrishvili's skills helped her remain calm amidst the turmoil and her efforts to resuscitate the child were successful. "To be honest, I really don't remember exactly what I was doing during those critical moments . . . I just reacted to the situation and tried to block out everything else in the room," she says, noting that in such times it is imperative to act almost without thinking. "Because I was able to practice these life-

AIHA partnership EMS Training Centers teach critical, life-saving skills to thousands of healthcare practitioners each year, providing them with the expertise and confidence necessary to react quickly and efficiently under difficult, sometimes dangerous circumstances. Training in CPR plays an important role in the basic two-week course for medical personnel that is generally offered once a month at many Centers—including the one in Tbilisi, Georgia, which has provided hands-on experience to nearly 1,550 physicians and 250 nurses since October 1995. This is the story of one physician who used the skills she acquired at the EMS Training Center in Tbilisi to save the life of an 8-month-old boy; the story of the child and his mother is on the other side.*

saving techniques over and over again at the Training Center, my reactions came automatically."

Noting that the training she received at the EMS Center has helped prepare her for almost any emergency, Peikrishvili continues, "I believe these courses have given me the knowledge and confidence to handle complications both at work and in other places. For example, my own son recently swallowed something and was choking and I was able to react calmly and quickly while my mother and my husband—who is also a physician—panicked. I wasn't frightened or confused . . . I was in control of the situation." After she saved young Ermine's life, Peikrishvili's colleagues began calling her a hero. Since then, she has used her CPR skills to resuscitate two other young patients. "I don't think of myself as a hero, though," she says modestly. "I love being able to help children and I'll always be grateful to the EMS Training Center for teaching me skills that make me a better doctor."

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