

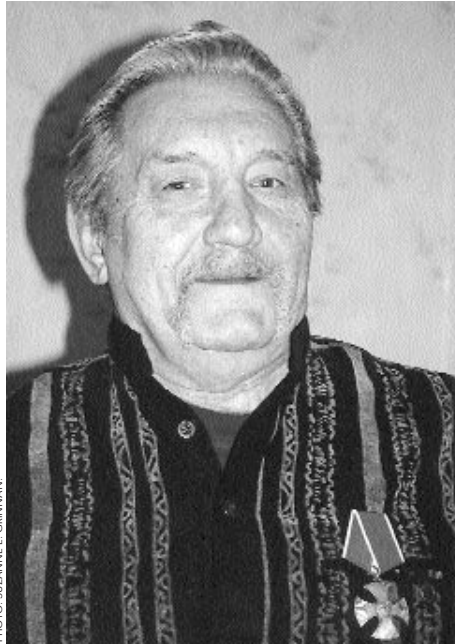
Home Visits Provide Care and Comfort for Disabled Man

"I am unable to walk much these days," Boris says with a shake of his graying head. "I can go about 20 meters, but then I have to sit down and rest." This condition is the result of a variety of cardiovascular and other ailments that have, over the course of the past decade, left the 69-year-old confined to the St. Petersburg apartment he shares with Tamara, his wife of 44 years.

A former airplane and robotics mechanic, Boris volunteered to travel to Ukraine in 1986 to assist with cleanup efforts following the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl. "I spent four and a half years there, rotating 15 days of work with 15 days of rest, during which time I returned home to be with my wife and son," Boris explains. "Robots were used to retrieve radioactive ore and other contaminated materials. I was a specialist in this area, so I felt it was my duty to help." It was a duty Boris carried out with pride—he was even awarded the Russian Order of Manhood for his efforts—though the fear of what prolonged exposure to radiation would do to him always loomed in the back of his mind.

"We tried to be careful, not to absorb too much radiation, but I suppose the things we did were of little help in the end," Boris says, explaining that the crews changed their uniforms daily and wore fabric masks—not respirators—while they worked. "They had a special person who measured the radiation each day and our uniforms were always contaminated, so I suppose we were all getting a good dose of it, too."

Six months after he stopped working at Chernobyl, Boris began to experience health problems. "I began having pain in my back and legs, and sometimes I would just lose consciousness. I had to live with my son and his family for about two years and was also admitted to the military medical academy for treatment for the fainting spells," he explains. No longer able to work, Boris was granted disability status and given a special pension. His condition continued to deteriorate and, by 1997, he was more or less housebound. When trips to the nearby clinic became too difficult to manage, Boris called his physician who arranged for in-home care. That's when he first met Marina Markova, senior nurse at Medical Center DELOR.



For Boris—who is wearing the medal he was awarded for his work in Chernobyl—living at home would be much more difficult without weekly visits from primary care nurse, Marina Markova.

"When Marina comes for her visits it is like youth, vigor, and beauty walk in the door with her," Boris says with an appreciative smile. "She's really very caring, attentive, and polite." She is also a skilled and knowledgeable nurse, he continues, noting that she provides a wide range of clinical services ranging from administering intravenous treatments and drawing blood samples to offering advice on nutrition and recommending admittance to the local hospital when necessary.

His wife shares his views on Marina and the home visits. "Marina is a wonderful person. She's been coming here to see Boris for more than three years now, so she really knows him and is familiar with his case. She treats him like a brother—she is so kind and attentive," Tamara explains. "It's also nice to have someone I can turn to for advice about health questions. Marina and her colleagues are very open and approachable, and answer all of our questions, no matter how inconsequential they may seem."

For the elderly and those recovering from illness or surgery, access to proper medical care can be difficult, or even impossible. Home visits from competent healthcare professionals can make a world of difference for such individuals. Many AIHA partnerships have implemented programs to serve this segment of the population and nurses are at the vanguard of efforts to bring clinical care, information, and compassion to homebound patients. In St. Petersburg, Russia, nurses from the Medical Center DELOR, a primary care facility started with assistance from the now-graduated St. Petersburg/Atlanta partners, treat as many as 110 people in their homes each month. This is the story of one man who receives home care visits; the story of the nurse who cares for him is on the other side.

Sitting at a table next to a vase of lilacs Tamara brought in for him, Boris reminisces about the time before he became so ill. "I would go to the stadium to watch soccer matches—I've loved soccer since I was a boy—and I would play basketball . . . I was strong and athletic." He would also fashion tin soldiers, using a special mold and soldering tools to replicate the uniforms of Russian troops from the 18th century. Now crossing the room is a chore and making the tiny soldiers is too stressful. "I still do some electronics projects though," he says with a shrug. "I can fix just about anything—televisions, clocks, watches—and family and friends often bring me things to repair. It's good to have something to do."

"For people who have no trouble getting around, Marina's visits may not seem all that important," Tamara says. "But, for Boris, they are everything."

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