

Partnership Changes How Physician Thinks About Doctor/Patient Relationship

“I think the most beautiful aspect of life is having children, so it is very important to me to help women become mothers” says gynecologist/endocrinologist Lydia Gumenyuk simply, speaking about why she



PHOTO: VIRA ILIASH.

Endocrinologist Lydia Gumenyuk, in her lab at the Odessa Family Planning Center, says there is nothing she likes better than “to help people make babies.”

chose to become a fertility specialist. “This can be a particular challenge in Ukraine where the infertility rate among married couples is about 10 percent,” she adds. But Gumenyuk, who has headed the Oblast Family Planning Center at the Odessa Oblast Clinical Hospital in Ukraine, since 2000 is up to the task. During her tenure she has helped more than 100 couples become pregnant.

According to Gumenyuk, many women and men who experience infertility-related problems often fail to have all of the necessary examinations to determine its cause due to the insensitive attitudes of physicians. Their frustration is further compounded by the need to visit different medical institutions to be tested for a single problem and a system that requires you to tell your story over and over to different specialists. This not only effects a patient’s mental well-being, but often results in

undetected problems and, therefore, unsuccessful treatment. Furthermore, infertility is often stereotypically attributed to women, while in reality the infertility rate among men is as high as 40 percent.

“When counseling a patient who is infertile or has a childbearing-related disease, we focus a great deal of attention on the psychological aspects of his or her problem,” says Dr. Gumenyuk. “Such patients need special attention and compassion from a physician. If we are to achieve a successful outcome, a physician must know, in detail, the personal life of the patient, his or her mental state, and, of course, the physiological characteristics of his or her body. In other words, there needs to be a partnership between the patient and the physician, a relationship based on complete mutual trust and understanding.”

According to Gumenyuk, it was the partnership between the Odessa Oblast Clinical Hospital and Coney Island Hospital in Brooklyn, New York that helped her understand and accept such a philosophy and, more importantly, achieve the desired success in her business.

“I remember my first trip to the United States. It was in 1997 and it completely changed my professional thinking and my attitude toward my patients,” she says with inspiration in her voice. “It was during that trip that I saw the valuable fruits brought to bear by the relationship between the patient and the doctor; realized the importance of using state-of-the-art treatment protocols and preventive care methods; and appreciated the advantage of using patient self-education techniques,” she recalls. “With the new treatment guidelines we brought from Coney Island or received at AIHA conferences and workshops, we helped several women who had been unable to become pregnant for six to eight years deliver healthy babies,” stresses Gumenyuk.

In 1998, as part of the women’s health initiative, AIHA provided the Center with modern diagnostic and treatment equipment, allowing physicians to “carry out advanced diagnoses, reveal pathologies, and prescribe the right treatment,” says Gumenyuk, adding that “patients are now given a complete examination in our Center and receive

The Oblast Family Planning Center at the Odessa Oblast Clinical Hospital in Ukraine—a member of AIHA’s now graduated Odessa/Coney Island partnership—provides medical services to reproductive-age women and men who suffer from infertility. In addition, it addresses childbearing problems, helps prevent unwanted pregnancies, and offers prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections. The Center is currently working with 252 women and 146 men who suffer from infertility. From March through May 2002, alone, 26 of those 252 women became pregnant, 24 of whom will carry to term (two miscarried). This is the story of how one doctor at the Center changed her approach to patients as a result of participating in the Odessa/Coney Island partnership; the story of a woman she treated for infertility is on the other.

advice from one of the specialists there. The patient’s awareness of the fact that she can get comprehensive aid without leaving this building goes a long way to reassuring her that we can provide the help she needs.”

“We’ve made our services more attractive to our patients by changing and adjusting our attitudes, which translates into them trusting us, improved outcomes, and a greater number of healthy children and strong families,” says Gumenyuk smiling. “One example is Liana’s case. When she came to us, neither she nor her husband truly believed in a successful outcome, particularly after all of her attempts to deliver a healthy baby. But after a careful examination and the correct treatment, we managed to overcome her infertility along with the fears associated with her previous failures. The birth of Nastya was a great reward for me, because my patients’ success is always my success and it makes me believe in myself,” Gumenyuk confesses. “Liana recently told me that Alexander and she were considering their second child. And, of course, I will be there to help them. I always love to help people make kids,” she laughs.

For more information on AIHA, visit www.aiha.com.

