A two-day workshop focusing on TB, HIV, hepatitis, and substance use in the Republic of Georgia was convened on 27-28 May 2008 in Tbilisi. Jack DeHovitz, MD, MPH of SUNY Downstate Medical Center and Dale Morse, MD, MS and Louise Anne McNutt, PhD of the University at Albany School of Public Health collaborated with US and Georgia faculty to organize this conference. The conference goal was to establish a research agenda for infectious disease in Georgia, with an emphasis on TB, HIV, and viral hepatitis, and to integrate these research priorities into Georgian public health training initiatives.

This is the third conference organized by NYS-ITRP in the region, facilitated in cooperation with Emory University's and Johns Hopkins University's Fogarty programs. During the first day of the workshop, both US and regional experts provided an update on current and future research initiatives of infectious disease, specifically TB, HIV, and HCV, and addressed the intersection of infectious disease and substance use, particularly injecting drug use. The day concluded with a discussion of efforts to expand the in-country capacity for multidisciplinary research through support for emerging local training programs in public health.

The second day of the workshop featured formal presentations by current Fogarty trainees and Fogarty alumni focusing on their current research endeavors. Each presentation was followed by analysis and discussion by US faculty, with the aim of mentoring Fogarty graduates in new research proposals and publications.

The total audience included 64 researchers and physicians from the Republic of Georgia, representing the various institutions that collaborate with the NIH Fogarty International Programs to build infectious disease research infrastructure, such as the Infectious Disease, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center in Tbilisi, the Center for Disease Control and Public Health, the National Center for TB and Lung Diseases, and the Georgian National TB Reference Laboratory.
In November 2007, STAR Health Center’s Genevieve Jeanbart, MSW and Patricia DiFusco, RN were invited to Russia by the Moscow-based organization AIDS Foundation East-West (AFEW) to train AFEW staff on the topic of providing supervision to HIV counselors. Ms. Jeanbart and Ms. DiFusco described this seminar, “Supervision for HIV/AIDS Counselors,” as one of their greatest achievements and one of the most challenging experiences they have had while working at SUNY Downstate Medical Center.

The three-day workshop consisted of training an audience of 18 medical professionals, including medical providers, psychologists, and clinic managers. Ms. Jeanbart and Ms. DiFusco were impressed by the receptiveness of the audience and their eagerness to learn about the subject, which helped make the training a great success.

Ms. Jeanbart and Ms. DiFusco developed a greater understanding of the challenges faced by Russian HIV counselors, many of which were similar to the challenges faced by HIV counselors in the United States. They were inspired by the others followed her address. Ms. Saakashvili-Roeofls returned to campus the following day to complete an observational rotation with the Emergency Department nursing staff at SUNY Downstate and Kings County Hospital Center, under the direction of Stephan Rinnert, MD, Residency Director of Emergency Medicine.

Ms. Saakashvili-Roeofls is co-Chair of the Georgian Country Coordination Mechanism (CCM) for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and in the past has worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross. In 1998, she founded the SOCO charitable foundation, which organizes projects throughout Georgia in areas such as education, culture, public awareness, and humanitarian assistance.

She is currently completing her nursing degree, in part inspired by her involvement in public health causes.

This is the second time that Ms. Saakashvili-Roeofls has visited SUNY Downstate Medical Center. Her first visit was in June 2006.
Third Annual NYS-ITRP Seminar a Success

From 16-18 January 2008, SUNY Downstate hosted a group of Georgian, Armenian, and Russian physicians as part of the New York State AIDS International Training and Research Program (NYS-ITRP). This seminar included presentations by Downstate faculty and staff on issues relevant to HIV research and treatment, including a review of the Women’s Interagency HIV Study (WIHS), current developments in ARV therapy, HIV/HCV co-infection, and the NIH grant application process. The trainees also participated in observation sessions at the HIV ambulatory clinic at the STAR Health Center and the Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Clinic at Kings County Hospital Center.

Four of the seminar’s participants, Drs. Edgar Manukyan (Armenia), Marina Topuridze (Georgia), Tina Karapetyan (Armenia), and Alexey Kruk (Russia) presented information about HIV and other STIs in Eastern Europe and the results of their independent research projects at the weekly Downstate HIV/ID Seminar.

Visits to the STAR Health Center and the STD Clinic at Kings County Hospital Center provided a unique opportunity for these physicians to observe clinical practices related to HIV and STI care. This augmented their coursework at the SUNY-Albany School of Public Health, where they are completing MS in Epidemiology or MPH degrees. The knowledge gained during their training in the United States will be applied toward the development of more effective HIV treatment and prevention strategies in their home countries, and their research will contribute to a better understanding of HIV in Eastern Europe.

NYS-ITRP Alumnus George Kamkamidze Panelist at Fogarty Anniversary Celebration in Mexico

On Saturday, 2 August 2008, immediately prior to the XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico City, the Fogarty International Center (FIC) conducted a meeting in celebration of its 40th Anniversary and the 20th Birthday of the AIDS International Training and Research Program (AITRP). This meeting provided a valuable opportunity to highlight the capacity building efforts for research in low- and middle-income countries accomplished through AITRP, the oldest research training program and the model for the FIC research training programs that followed.

The meeting included four panels composed of current and former AITRP trainees, who were nominated by their research training program directors as “stars”. Nearly 50 such nominations were received, and the FIC planning committee selected the final 16 panelists to achieve a balance among the various AITRP grantees, panelists’ countries of origin, their scientific area, and time since training. Roughly half of the panel speakers had abstracts that were accepted to be presented as posters or oral presentations and the AIDS 2008 conference. The panels were used to highlight how FIC-supported training fostered their development as scientists.

Georgian NYS-ITRP alumnus George Kamkamidze, MD, PhD, MS was among the panelists at this meeting. Through NYS-ITRP Dr. Kamkamidze completed post-doc training at the SUNY Albany School of Public Health from 1998-2000, and returned to Albany to complete an MS in Biostatistics in 2006-2008. He is currently Head of the Board of the Georgian Maternal and Child Care Union, and Clinical Director of NeoClinic in Tbilisi. His work was presented at the Mexico conference in a poster, Evaluating the feasibility impact of couple-oriented prenatal HIV counseling & testing in low- & medium-prevalence countries (TUPE0387).
Dr. Stefanoff is Head of the Unit of Surveillance of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases within the department of Epidemiology at the National Institute of Public Health - National Institute of Hygiene in Warsaw, Poland. From 2002-2004, he participated in the “MS in Epidemiology program at the SUNY Albany School of Public Health as a Fogarty Fellow.”

1. What motivated you to pursue training through the Fogarty New York State International Training and Research Program?

After obtaining a medical degree at the Warsaw Medical University I decided to continue my career as a scientist. During my studies I had already started some research projects, but realized that medical studies did not prepare me appropriately to design and perform good quality studies in the medical field. At that time there were very few opportunities to study epidemiology in Poland. When searching for different options, I was employed at the Department of Epidemiology at the National Institute of Hygiene in Warsaw and started to work in the field of communicable diseases. A senior researcher at the Department, its current Head - Professor Andrzej Zielinski - was one of the contacts of the Fogarty NYS ITRP for Poland and introduced me to the program. The most important motivation for applying to this program was the unavailability of training in the country and the possibility to learn about the way of performing epidemiological research in the United States.

2. Can you tell us what you remember about your experience while training?

The first months at the school were difficult because of the new epidemiological language that I had to learn along with new concepts. The first semester was quite intensive, and it really introduced me to the field. The second most intensive period was the preparation of the Thesis, when I could work with my excellent mentors from the school and the New York State Department of Health. Apart from work, I met wonderful friends from Georgia and Armenia. I have spent a lot of time with them and I will never forget them.

3. What is the focus of your current work? How did the New York State International Training and Research Program prepare you for what you are doing now?

I am currently responsible for the surveillance of vaccine-preventable diseases in Poland. With a small team, we are processing and analyzing epidemiological data collected in the country for childhood vaccine-preventable diseases (e.g. measles, mumps, pertussis, etc.), and bacterial invasive diseases (e.g. meningococcal disease, pneumococcal disease, etc.). We are collaborating with international organizations, including the European Center of Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). I am involved in epidemiological training at the national and international levels, and I also carry out epidemiological research. The Fogarty Program training permitted me to take on new responsibilities more quickly and led to my involvement in teaching younger colleagues.

4. Have you been awarded any grants since completing your training? If so, please tell us about them.

Since I returned from the Fogarty fellowship in May 2004, I have been involved in four research and public health projects. Two of them are part of a European Commission-funded network of excellence, called Med-Vet-Net, which was started before my return from the United States. These projects focus on the prioritization of food-borne zoonoses in Europe, and compiling a risk assessment of transmission of tick-borne encephalitis via milk in Poland, using goat milk production as an example. I am also the local coordinator of another EC-funded public health project entitled “Vaccine Safety: Attitudes, Training, Communication (VACSATC),” which evaluates the attitudes of parents towards immunization practices, and provides independent website information on vaccine safety. Additionally, I was awarded a grant through the Global Research Initiative Program for New Foreign Investigators (GRIP) of the National Institutes of Health to conduct a two-stage epidemiological study of tick-borne encephalitis risk in Poland. Obtaining the above-mentioned grants has allowed for the hiring of two scientists, considerably improving of the performance of the vaccine-preventable disease epidemiology unit.

5. What was the hardest part about living in Albany?

The most difficult time was the beginning of the fellowship, when I had to find an apartment and furnish it in (Continued on next page)
the simplest way possible. Since the administration and services work in a different way than in my country, it was not easy to adapt in a few days. The help of friends from Armenia and Georgia allowed me to better adapt to the local life.

6. What are some of your future plans?
I plan to continue my work in the field of communicable diseases in Poland. I am also considering applying for work in other European countries or international organizations to get experience with different working environments.

Fogarty Alum Receives NIDA-funded CRDF Substance Use Research Grant
We are pleased to announce that Estonian Fogarty alum Anneli Uuskula, MD, PhD, MS in collaboration with Don Des Jarlais, PhD was recently awarded a grant by the US Civilian Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) for the project “HIV transmission among injecting and non-injecting drug users in Tallinn, Estonia,” as part of the 2008 NIDA Cooperation in HIV/AIDS and Drug Abuse Competition. The project aims to assess the current HIV epidemic among both injecting and non-injecting drug users in Tallinn, to investigate the social linkages between these groups and the potential for HIV transmission from injecting to non-injecting drug users, and to assess the need for new HIV prevention efforts within these groups.

SUNY Albany School of Public Health Faculty Member Receives Fulbright Fellowship
Congratulations to Louise-Anne McNutt, PhD of the University at Albany School of Public Health, who during 2008 was a Fulbright Scholar at Tbilisi State Medical University and an International Scholar for the Open Society Institute at the Health Sciences University of Mongolia. At both universities she worked to build the educational capacities of their new Schools of Public Health.

NYS-ITRP Receives Research Training Grant on AIDS-related Malignancies
In October 2008, the NYS-ITRP received a grant award to support “AIDS-related Malignancies Research Training” from NIH/FIC. This training program will build on the research training infrastructure provided by NYS-ITRP with the goal to train researchers on issues related to cervical cancer among HIV-seropositive women in Eastern and Central Europe.

Not only does the general population of Eastern Europe have three-fold higher cervical cancer rates than found in Western Europe, but women with HIV/AIDS have high risk of cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is in fact, an AIDS-defining illness. Consistent with this, HIV/AIDS is associated with increased incidence and persistence of oncogenic cervical human papillomavirus (HPV), the viral cause of cervical cancer and a greater incidence and persistence of precancerous cervical lesions. This problem is most acute in Poland which has higher rates of HIV in women compared to other Central European countries.

In Eastern and Central Europe, there is limited current expertise in HPV and cervical neoplasia, especially as it relates to women with HIV/AIDS. Our multi-institutional training program will include: (i) didactic epidemiology and biostatistics courses; (ii) training in conducting epidemiologic research regarding HIV/AIDS and its effects on HPV and cervical neoplasia; (iii) training in using HPV DNA laboratory test methods; and (iv) mentorship in developing a research protocol in HPV among HIV-seropositive women.

Although Year 1 of this training will be focused on Poland, there may be some additional opportunities for trainees from other Central/Eastern European countries. With this grant we will work collaboratively with Albert Einstein College of Medicine (AECOM) in New York City, building on pre-existing relationships between ourselves and AECOM and involving ongoing collaborative studies of HIV and HPV in the United States.

SUNY Downstate Student to be NIH/Fogarty Fellow in Thailand
Noriyuki Murakami, a fourth-year student in SUNY Downstate Medical Center’s College of Medicine, has been awarded a fellowship by the National Institutes of Health/Fogarty International Clinical Research Scholars Program.

Mr. Murakami’s fellowship will take place at Chiang Mai University in Thailand, in partnership with the Johns Hopkins University Fogarty AIDS International Training and Research Program. NYS-ITRP Co-Director Dr. Jack DeHovitz will serve as
Mr. Murakami’s faculty mentor.

The NIH/Fogarty International Clinical Research Scholars Program pairs American students with international students in the health sciences, creating partnerships and an international community of global health research scholars. These paired scholars receive a year of mentored clinical research training at an NIH-funded advanced research center in a developing country, where they conduct research on a variety of issues, including HIV/AIDS and related infections, sexually transmitted and other chronic diseases, malaria, and neurological and dietary issues.

**SUNY Downstate awarded Twinning Partnership Grant in South Africa**

In January this year, SUNY Downstate Medical Center was awarded a “Twinning Partnership” grant (Jack DeHovitz, PI) by the American International Health Alliance (AIHA) through a cooperative agreement with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the US Department of Health and Human Services; these activities have been funded as part of the implementation of the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which recently received congressional reauthorization. (Both AIHA and PEPFAR have made significant contributions to HIV related training and health services in East Europe as well.)

In this grant, SUNY Downstate partners with the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Specifically, SUNY Downstate faculty works with the Centre for Health Systems Research and Development (CHSR&D) which has a number of behavioral research projects in HIV/TB prevention and care in the province of the Free State. The focus of our partnership is to strengthen the capacity of CHSR&D faculty to manage research projects that inform HIV and TB healthcare practice and policy in South Africa. In January SUNY Downstate faculty made an assessment trip to South Africa; this summer our South African colleagues traveled to the US for research training; and additional SUNY faculty traveled to South Africa in November to conduct epidemiology and biostatistics training. We look forward to continuing this partnership in the coming year.

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**New NYS-ITRP Website**

We invite you to view our new and improved NYS-ITRP website at http://www.downstate.edu/nysitrp/. There you will be able to keep up with program developments, download present and past newsletters, and view a list of relevant funding opportunities. Prospective Fogarty applicants can also download our brochure and find detailed information about the Fogarty NYS-ITRP application process.

**New Mandatory PubMed Requirement for all Fogarty Sponsored Publications**

As of April 7, 2008, it has become mandatory for publications whose investigators have received funding through the Fogarty program (AITRP/ICOHRTA, etc.) to be submitted to PubMed Central upon acceptance for publication. We also want to remind you to cite FIC, any FIC partners, and the grant number in any publication related to Fogarty funded grants.

**NYS-ITRP Renewal in 2009**

NYS-ITRP needs your help! Over the next few months we will be assembling our application for competitive renewal to the National Institutes of Health. You will be receiving an email from us with a link to a secure online survey, through which you can evaluate NYS-ITRP and provide us with updated career developments, presentation, publication, and extramural grant information. Your cooperation will be vital to the completion of a successful application, so we thank you in advance for your assistance.  

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New Publishing Opportunities

*The Journal of the International AIDS Society* is an open access, peer-reviewed online journal that encompasses all aspects of HIV-related research from various disciplines, strongly encouraging publications from investigators carrying out research in low- and middle-income countries. For more information, visit [http://www.jiasociety.org/](http://www.jiasociety.org/).

*Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Infectious Diseases* is an open access, peer-reviewed journal that publishes original research papers and state of art reviews of broad interest on the transmission, pathogenesis and evolution of infectious agents. Submitted manuscripts can report any aspect of laboratory, epidemiologic, environmental, social or animal research on infectious diseases. For more information, visit [http://www.hindawi.com/journals/ipid/](http://www.hindawi.com/journals/ipid/).


Journal Watch Publications (who publishes AIDS Clinical Care) has recently made their publications available "online" at no cost to over 100 resource limited countries, including Georgia and Armenia. For more information, visit [http://www.jwatch.org/misc/help/access.dtl#lowincome](http://www.jwatch.org/misc/help/access.dtl#lowincome).

The Global Health Research Initiative Program for New Foreign Investigators (GRIP) promotes productive re-entry of NIH-trained foreign investigators into their home countries as part of a broader program to enhance the scientific research infrastructure in developing countries, to stimulate research on a wide variety of high priority health-related issues in these countries, and to advance NIH efforts to address health issues of global import. See [http://www.fic.nih.gov/programs/research_grants/grip/](http://www.fic.nih.gov/programs/research_grants/grip/) for more information. Submission deadlines are:

- September 21, 2009; (Behavioral and Social Sciences) or September 21, 2009 (Basic and Biomedical Sciences).
- Submission deadline for AIDS applications: December 18, 2008.

The Fogarty International Research Collaboration Award (FIRCA) provides funds ($150,000 over three years) to foster international research partnerships between NIH-supported US scientists and their collaborators in countries of the developing world. The FIRCA program aims to benefit the research interests of both the US and foreign collaborators while increasing research capacity at the foreign site. All areas of biomedical and behavioral research supported NIH are eligible FIRCA research topics, except for HIV/AIDS. For more information, visit [http://www.fic.nih.gov/programs/research_grants/firca/](http://www.fic.nih.gov/programs/research_grants/firca/). Submission deadline: September 29, 2009 (Behavioral and Social Sciences) or January 28, May 28 and September 29, 2009 (Basic and Biomedical Sciences).
Welcome New & Returning Trainees!

Michal Czerwinski, DVM joins us from the Department of Epidemiology at the National Institute of Hygiene in Warsaw, Poland, where he has been working as a Research Assistant. He began the MS in Epidemiology program at the SUNY-Albany School of Public Health in Fall 2008.

Keti Sidamonidze, MD joins us from the Molecular Epidemiology Department at the National Center for Disease Control and Medical Statistics in Tbilisi, Georgia. Keti has begun training this August in the Parasitic Disease Laboratory at the New York State Department of Health in Albany, New York.

Peter Meylakhs, PhD is a senior researcher from the Centre for Independent Social Research in St. Petersburg, Russia. He is currently participating in a one-year training program in behavioral research methods in substance use and HIV prevention at the National Development and Research Institutes, Inc. (NDRI) in New York City, New York.

Alexey Kruk, MD, MSc, a returning Fogarty fellow, joins us from Moscow, Russia, where he has been involved in research and education activities in the Department of Health Management and Social Hygiene in the Medical Department at the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, and at AIDS Foundation East West (AFEW). In collaboration with the US Centers for Disease Control, his thesis research focuses on expediting HIV diagnosis in infants born to HIV positive mothers in St. Petersburg. He is now completing the second year of the MS in Epidemiology program at the University at Albany School of Public Health.

Ekaterine Pestvenidze, MD, a returning Fogarty fellow, is a pediatrician from Kutaisi, Georgia, who has served as a Clinical Officer with the JSI Research and Training Institute’s Healthy Women in Georgia Program. Her thesis research will culminate in an evaluation of Hepatitis B prevention efforts in Georgia. She is now completing the second year of the MS in Epidemiology program at the University at Albany School of Public Health.

Yeghishe Nazinyan, MD, a returning Fogarty fellow, joins us from the Department of Epidemiology at Yerevan State Medical University in Yerevan, Armenia. His thesis research focuses on the seroprevalence of blood-borne infections among blood donors in Armenia, and risk factors associated with positive markers of blood-borne infections such as HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B and C, Syphilis, and Brucellosis. He is now completing the second year of the MS in Epidemiology program at the University at Albany School of Public Health.

Matuta Bzhalava, MD is a returning joint Muskie/Fogarty fellow from Zugdidi, Georgia, with a background in medicine and infectious disease. She is currently in her second year of training in the MPH in Health Policy Management program at the University at Albany School of Public Health.

Lilit Hovakimyan, MD, a returning Fogarty fellow, joins us from Yerevan State Medical University in Yerevan, Armenia. Her thesis research, conducted in the prenatal clinic attached to the Institute of Perinatology, Obstetrics and Gynecology in Yerevan, focuses on non-mandatory tested infections among pregnant women and the indicators for offering tests for these infections. She is now completing the second year of the MS in Epidemiology program at the University at Albany School of Public Health.

The 16th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI 2009) will be convened on February 8-11, 2009 in Montreal, Quebec. CROI is a scientifically focused meeting of the world’s leading researchers working to understand, prevent, and treat HIV/AIDS and its complications. General registration for researchers and clinicians begins November 24, 2008. For more information, visit http://www.retroconference.org/2009/.

The IAPAC 4th International Conference on HIV Treatment Adherence will take place on April 5-7, 2009 in Miami, Florida. The goal of this conference is to provide an international forum for the presentation and discussion of state-of-the-science HIV treatment adherence research, as well as current behavioral and clinical perspectives in practice. The deadline for abstract submission is December 1, 2008. The deadline for standard registration is March 13, 2009. For more information, visit http://www.iapac.org/AdherenceConference/AdherenceConf2009-info.html.


Gyarmathy VA, Neaigus A. The Relationship of Sexual Dyad and Personal Network Characteristics and Individual Attributes to Unprotected Sex Among Young Injecting Drug Users. AIDS Behav. 2007 Aug 10. [Epub ahead of print]