A two-day workshop focusing on TB, HIV, hepatitis, nutrition, and research training options was convened on 27-28 May 2009 in Tbilisi, Georgia. This training event was organized by the Fogarty programs of SUNY Downstate Medical Center, the University at Albany School of Public Health, Emory University, and various other US and Georgian academic and research institutions.

Sandra Roelofs, First Lady of Georgia and Chair of the Country Coordination Mechanism (CCM), opened the conference by emphasizing the importance of the continuation of various US–Georgia partnerships in research training. Next, regional experts provided updates on TB, HIV, HCV, and TB, followed by special presentations on the interaction between nutrition and infectious disease and the use of Vitamin D in the treatment of TB. The opening afternoon session was devoted to the principles of implementation science, followed by a presentation on the global emergence of XDR TB. The day concluded with two panels discussing strategic collaborations in research training, with the goal to further develop the in-country research infrastructure within Georgia. Presenters provided an overview of CDC’s FELTP (Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program) and the US/Georgia joint research lab supported by DTRA (Defense Threat Reduction Agency). The final panel presented on public health training programs in Georgia currently working in partnership with Fogarty programs.

The second day of the workshop began with a presentation on bioethics in Georgian research context, followed by an overview of extramural funding opportunities and processes. The balance of the day was a mentoring session, with three panels of current Fogarty fellows and alumni providing updates on their research funding applications and research publication updates. US faculty provided each fellow with... (Continued on page 3)
Immediately following the May 2009 US-Georgia Infectious Disease Research Conference in Tbilisi, a formal ceremony was held to commemorate the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the New York State International Training and Research Program (NYS-ITRP) and the Tbilisi State Medical University School of Public Health (TSMU SPH).

In attendance at the ceremony were NYS-ITRP Directors Drs. Jack DeHovitz and Dale Morse, the Deputy Ministers of Health and Education of Georgia, the Rector of TSMU, and the Dean of TSMU SPH.

The development of the TSMU SPH program represents a significant milestone in building public health capacity within the country of Georgia. Over the past decade, a variety of Fogarty sponsored (NYS-ITRP, Emory AITRP/GID) and other programs have supported US university-based MPH or MS training for Georgian scientists and health professionals. These collaborations have established a critical mass of public health expertise in Georgia sufficient to provide a Master's level public health education. This effort was catalyzed by NYS-ITRP faculty Dr. Louise-Anne McNutt’s Fulbright fellowship focusing on work with former NYS-ITRP fellows Maia Butashvili, MD, MS and George Kamkamidze MD, PhD to develop the joint MPH program at TSMU.

In this important bridge to building public health capacity of Georgia, selected TSMU SPH students will attend one summer and one semester of advanced epidemiology coursework at the SUNY Albany School of Public Health as part of their MPH degree program at TSMU. The first fellows from this collaboration initiated their studies in the United States in June 2009.

Launch of New Georgia-US Collaborative MPH Program Celebrated in Tbilisi

In May 2009, Samuel Friedman, PhD and Peter Meylakhs, PhD presented at the 18th “International Conference on AIDS, Cancer, and Public Health,” an annual conference facilitated by the Biomedical Center in St. Petersburg, Russia. Friedman is a Senior Research Fellow and the Director of the Interdisciplinary Theoretical Synthesis Core in the Center for Drug Use and HIV Research (CDUHR) at National Development and Research Institutes, Inc. (NDRI) in New York City. CDUHR/NDRI has been a collaborating institution with NYS-ITRP program for the past five years, providing substance use research training to fellows from Estonia and Russia. For the past year, Dr. Friedman has been mentoring Dr. Meylakhs of the Center for Independent Social Research in St. Petersburg, Russia, on research design and field studies related to the strategies and tactics that some injecting drug users have developed to remain uninfected with HIV and HCV as part of the “Staying Safe Project.”

Dr. Friedman presented on “Positive Deviance Research Designs and What They Tell Us About How Drug Users Protect Themselves Against HIV and HCV Transmission In Spite of All the Obstacles.” In sum, Dr. Friedman’s positive deviance research focused on how some injecting drug users avoid infections, even though many of them were living in severely marginalized settings. This research which uses control-case life history designs might be applied to other epidemiologic topics such as how some sex workers or group sex participants remain uninfected with STDs or how some injecting drug users successfully navigate HAART or hepatitis C treatment.

Dr. Meylakhs presented on “Reducing HIV and Other Risks Associated with Devolution (Severe Loss of Control) among Injection Drug Users.” Dr. Meylakhs described “indigenous” approaches that have been developed by IDUs, aided in some cases by friends and relatives, to avoid HIV and HCV infection. In this New York City-based study, a number of uninfected subjects managed to avoid high-risk behaviors that stem from loss of control over the contexts and conditions of drug use by skillfully using social and institutional resources. Dr. Friedman and Dr. Meylakhs are currently formulating research proposals to determine if similar strategies employed by subjects in the “Staying Safe Project” will be effective and appropriate in Russia.
Fourth Annual Collaborative US-Georgia Workshop

(Continued)

analysis and recommendations for new research proposals, publication strategies, and the enhancement of their academic careers.

This is the fourth conference facilitated by NYS-ITRP in the region, organized in cooperation with Emory University’s and Johns Hopkins University’s Fogarty programs.

There were more than a hundred conference attendees, including researchers, physicians, and ministers of health from Georgia, representing the various institutions that collaborate with Fogarty programs: the Infectious Disease, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center, the Center for Disease Control and Public Health, the National Center for TB and Lung Diseases, and the Georgian National TB Reference Laboratory.

NYS-ITRP Alumna and Collaborator Awarded Grant to Develop HIV Prevention Packages for IDUs in Estonia

Fogarty NYS-ITRP Alumna Anneli Uuskula, MD, MS, PhD and collaborator Don Des Jarlais, PhD have received funding from the National Institutes of Health to evaluate and further develop HIV prevention intervention strategies for IDUs in Estonia. This study is funded through the NIH R01 Methods for Prevention Packages Program (MP3).

According to recent data, HIV prevalence is currently over fifty percent (50%) among IDUs in Tallinn, Estonia, and estimated incidence is over 20/100 person-years at risk. Simultaneously, IDUs report high rates of multiple sexual partnerships with inconsistent condom use. The proposed research aims to monitor the ongoing high seroprevalence HIV epidemics among IDUs in Tallinn; to assess current interventions; to develop multidisciplinary intervention models to prevent HIV transmission in this population. This project will conclude with a pilot study that involves screening and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among IDUs in Tallinn to assess feasibility and effectiveness in reducing sexual transmission among IDUs and from IDUs to non-drug injecting sexual partners.

This study will address two public health problems critical to other countries beyond Estonia: reducing HIV transmission among IDUs, and preventing transmission from IDUs to non-drug injecting sexual partners, thus halting the transition from a concentrated IDU epidemic to a generalized heterosexual epidemic. While there are several interventions that have been shown effective in reducing risk behavior among IDUs, no single intervention is effective for all IDUs. This suggests that these inter-related problems provide an ideal context for studying combinations of prevention programs.

NYS-ITRP Fellows Travel to Brooklyn for Annual Downstate HIV Seminar

In January 2009, SUNY Downstate hosted a group of Georgian, Armenian, Polish, Estonian and Russian public health professionals for the NYS-ITRP Annual Downstate HIV Seminar. The seminar included presentations by both Downstate and Albert Einstein School of Medicine faculty and staff on issues relevant to HIV research and treatment, including Mental Health Issues and HIV; HIV Policy; HIV Prevention and Care for Adolescents; an HCV overview; an HPV overview; and HIV Pathogenesis. Seminar attendees 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. Michal Czerwinski (Poland), Alexey Kruk (Russia), Yeghishe Nazinyan (Armenia), and Lilit Hovakimyan (Armenia) presented information about HIV and other STIs in Central and Eastern Europe and the results of their independent research projects at the weekly Downstate HIV/ID Seminar. This year’s seminar was also attended by HPV/HIV experts from Poland and Estonia who were funded by the Fogarty NYS-ITRP AIDS Malignancies supplement.
Dr. Gyarmathy is currently a Scientific Writer at the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction in Lisbon, Portugal. From 1997-1999 she completed the MPH program at the SUNY Albany School of Public Health as a Fogarty Fellow.

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

Getting good quality education. I was working in the field of AIDS prevention at the time I heard about the training program, and I felt that it would improve the quality of my work. I wanted to learn new things and advanced methods about health education, behavioral sciences and statistics, and I felt that the training program could give me that education. My expectations towards the program were met and exceeded: I got excellent training and mentorship.

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

As a result of endless hours in the computer lab doing SAS homework, I became a highly competent SAS programmer. The group projects were fun: I enjoyed collaborating with other students and getting to know their unique professional and personal backgrounds. I also enjoyed the excellent student-teacher relationships with our professors. They were always very helpful. For example, my wonderful mentor, Dr. Louise-Anne McNutt has given me lots of insightful advice about my career (not only during my years as a trainee but even years later), and helped me achieve lots of career goals.

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

I currently work in Lisbon, Portugal at the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) as a Scientific Writer. The training program gave me an excellent professional basis to gain employment at a private organization in New York, the National Development and Research Institutes, and I used much of that knowledge to acquire a PhD summa cum laude from Semmelweis University in Hungary, which lead to a post-doctoral position at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. This solid professional background lead to a successful application to my current position, which I absolutely love. I consider the training program to be the foundation of my current professional status.

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

In 2003 I received an R03 grant from NIDA – the project was entitled “Young Drug Users and HIV Risk in Budapest, Hungary”. Luckily I do not have to compete for grant support at my current position because my organization receives EU funding.

What was the hardest part about living in the US? In Hungary?

I adapted very well to the US. The abundance of choices was confusing at the beginning: you can choose 5 different bagels with 15 different things on them, that’s 75 bagels to chose from. And all I wanted was a bagel with something on it. The hardest part about living in Hungary, at the time I applied for the Fogarty Training Program, was being taken seriously as a young female professional.

What are some of your future plans?

I am embarrassed to say that I am still not fluent in Portuguese – it is my goal to speak Portuguese at a conversation level. I also want to learn diving – we live on the beach, so I would like to take advantage of this wonderful situation. In addition, I have been teaching my son swimming, and I would like to continue “playing in the water” with him to improve his swimming skills. I would also like to do more bicycling and outdoors activities. And having another kid! Ah... am I being too European and you mean future professional plans? In that regards, my future plans are to continue contributing to the scientific excellence of my organization, the EMCDDA.
Three NYS-ITRP Alumni Awarded Fogarty Advanced In-Country Research Support

Congratulations to Fogarty Alumni Nikoloz Chkhartishvili, MD, MS, Marina Topuridze, MD, MS and Maia Kajaia, MD, MS, all recipients of Fogarty Advanced In-Country Research Training Support in 2009. Research for Dr. Chkhartishvili’s project entitled “Levels and correlates of antiretroviral adherence and its relationship to high risk behavior among patients attending AIDS referral center in the Republic of Georgia” will be conducted at the ID, AIDS, and Clinical Immunology Research Center in Tbilisi. Dr. Topuridze’s project, “Improving coverage of HBV vaccine among health care workers,” aims to assess the efficacy of an educational intervention in increasing HBV vaccine coverage among health care workers. Through Dr. Kajaia’s research focused on “HCV Transmission between Cohabitating Sexual Partners in Georgia,” she plans to identify risk factors for HCV infection in the sexual partners of HCV positive individuals. Both Drs. Topuridze and Kajaia are employed at the Maternal and Child Care Union in Tbilisi.

Georgian ID, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center Recognized by WHO

Congratulations to the Infectious Diseases, AIDS, and Clinical Immunology Research Center in Tbilisi, Georgia, recipient of the 2009 Dr. Lee Jong-wook Memorial Prize for Public Health. The award, presented by the World Health Organization, recognizes IDACIRC for its outstanding contribution in research into and prevention, treatment, and control of HIV/AIDS, and research into and control of infectious diseases. The prize, which consisted of a commemorative plaque and monetary award, was presented at a formal ceremony during the 62nd World Health Assembly in Geneva in May 2009.

NYS-ITRP Alumni Receive Award to Investigate HPV Prevalence and Awareness among Georgian Women

We are pleased to announce that in March 2009 Fogarty alumni Maia Butsashvili, MD, MS and George Kamkamidze, MD, PhD of the Maternal and Child Care Union in Tbilisi, Georgia, received an award from the Georgian National Science Foundation to investigate “Prevalence and Awareness of Human Papillomavirus among Georgian Women.” The goal of the project is to study the epidemiology of HPV infection and related morbidity in Georgia and develop recommendations for HPV and cervical cancer education programs for health care workers and women.
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 22, 2010; (Behavioral and Social Sciences) or September 22, 2010 (Basic and Biomedical Sciences). Submission deadline for AIDS applications: December 18, 2010.

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, 2010 (Behavioral and Social Sciences) or September 28, 2010 (Basic and Biomedical Sciences).

Through the NIH Dissemination and Implementation Research in Health (R03) Funding Opportunity Announcement, investigators are encouraged to submit research grant applications that will identify, develop, and refine effective and efficient methods, structures, and strategies to disseminate and implement research-tested health behavior change interventions and evidence-based prevention, early detection, diagnostic, treatment, and quality of life improvement services into public health and clinical practice settings. Budgets for direct costs of up to $50,000 per year and a project duration of up to two years may be requested for a maximum of $100,000 direct costs over a two-year project period. For more information, see [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAR-10-039.html](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAR-10-039.html).

With the support of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the International AIDS Society (IAS) has established the IAS/NIDA HIV and Drug Use Fellowship programme focusing on HIV and drug use, with the goal of contributing to advances in the scientific understanding of drug use and HIV, while fostering multinational research on HIV and drug use. This fellowship programme consists of two types of awards: US$75,000 to be awarded to a junior scientist for 18-months for post-doctoral training and US$75,000 to be awarded to a well-established HIV researcher for eight-month long professional development training, both at leading institutes excelling in research in the HIV-related drug use field.

In 2010, up to four fellowships will be awarded in conjunction with the XVIII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2010) in Vienna, Austria on 18-23 July 2010. Please note: While applications from across the globe are welcomed, scientists from Eastern Europe and Central Asia are strongly encouraged to submit their applications. Submission deadline: 10 February 2010. For more information (including eligibility requirements), see [http://www.iasociety.org/Default.aspx?pageId=288](http://www.iasociety.org/Default.aspx?pageId=288).
The 17th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI 2010) will be convened on February 16-19, 2010 in San Francisco, California. 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 on November 30, 2009. For more information, visit http://www.retroconference.org/2010/.

The XVIII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2010), will be held in Vienna, Austria, from July 18-23, 2010. The International AIDS Conference is the premier gathering for those working in the field of HIV, as well as policy makers, persons living with HIV, and other individuals committed to ending the pandemic. The selection of the AIDS 2010 host city will allow for an examination of the epidemic’s impact in Eastern Europe. The deadline for abstract submissions is February 10, 2010. For more information, visit http://www.aids2010.org/.

The Infectious Diseases Society of America’s (IDSA) 48th Annual Meeting, developed in collaboration with the HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA), will be convened from October 21-24, 2010 in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. IDSA represents physicians, scientists, and other health care professionals who specialize in infectious diseases. IDSA’s purpose is to improve the health of individuals, communities, and society by promoting excellence in patient care, education, research, public health, and prevention relating to infectious diseases. The HIV Medicine Association is an organization of medical professionals who practice HIV medicine. It represents the interests of patients by promoting quality in HIV care and by advocating for policies that ensure a comprehensive and humane response to the AIDS pandemic. For more information, see http://www.idsociety.org/meetings.htm.

The 50th Interscience Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy (ICAAC) will occur on September 12-15, 2010 in Boston, Massachusetts. More than 10,000 physicians, researchers and other healthcare professionals from around the globe will gather at the 50th ICAAC to foster worldwide solutions to the problem of infectious diseases. To enrich the attendee experience, the ICAAC Program Committee will select faculty that includes internationally renowned scientists and will complement the invited program with slide and poster abstract presentations. The deadline for abstract submission is Friday, May 7, 2010. For more information, see http://www.icaac.org/.

NYS-ITRP Website
We invite you to view our 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.

Reminder: MandatoryPubMed 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 (AIDTRP/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.

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/.

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/.

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.
Welcome New & Returning Fellows!

Damir Bikmukhametov, MD, PhD joins us from the Department of Pediatric Infectious Diseases at Kazan State Medical University in Kazan, Tatarstan in the Russian Federation. Dr. Bikmukhametov is also a physician at the Republic of Tatarstan HIV/AIDS Center in Kazan. He began the MS in Epidemiology program at the University at Albany School of Public Health in Fall 2009.

Tamar Kikvidze, MD joins us from the Tbilisi State Medical University School of Public Health in Tbilisi, Georgia, where she is pursuing an MPH degree. Dr. Kikvidze is completing advanced coursework in epidemiology at the University at Albany School of Public Health as part of the new NYS-ITRP Georgia-US Collaborative MPH Program.

Marika Kochlamazashvili, DDS joins us from the Tbilisi State Medical University School of Public Health in Tbilisi, Georgia, where she is pursuing an MPH degree. Dr. Kochlamazashvili is completing advanced coursework in epidemiology at the University at Albany School of Public Health as part of the new NYS-ITRP Georgia-US Collaborative MPH Program.

Mariam Zakalashvili joins us from the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health in Tbilisi, Georgia. Ms. Zakalashvili has begun advanced training this Summer in the Laboratory of Viral Diseases at the New York State Department of Health in Albany, New York.

Mamuka Khvedelidze, MD, PhD joins us from the Infectious Diseases, AIDS, and Clinical Immunology Research Center in Tbilisi, Georgia. Dr. Khvedelidze has begun advanced training this Fall in the Immunology Laboratory at the New York State Department of Health in Albany, New York.

Michal Czerwinski, DVM, a returning Fogarty fellow, joins us from the Department of Epidemiology at the National Institute of Hygiene in Warsaw, Poland. Dr. Czerwinski’s thesis research aims to evaluate the impact of gender on risk behaviors and risk factors associated with HIV infection among Polish IDUs. He is now completing the second year of the MS in Epidemiology program at the University at Albany School of Public Health.


(Continued on next page)
Selected Publications (Continued)

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. 2009 Apr; 13(2):196-206. [PMID: 17690975]


