Welcome to a special 20th Anniversary Issue of NYS-ITRP Connections!

This year NYS-ITRP celebrates twenty years of operation! In our newsletters we typically review all of the program accomplishment over the past year. As part of our anniversary celebrations, we decided that it would be appropriate to reflect on our accomplishments since we welcomed our first Fogarty Fellows in 1994. In this special 20th anniversary edition you will read about our Alumni Reunion event and hear from two of our former Fogarty who completed training with us at various times in
the history of the program. We also have a special two-page photo collage that features moments throughout the training experiences of our alumni and faculty. As usual, we also have profiles of all of our current fellows and a review of the program activities in 2013.

While NYS-ITRP officially started operation in 1994, it took several years to fully respond to the need for changes in public health systems in the former Soviet Union. Public health practices during Soviet times were based on a model in which workers committees were responsible for supervision of hospitals, public health and public health education. There were no schools of public health and research was confined to the Academies of Science. Following the political changes, there was a dramatic decline in income coupled with an expansion of informal and criminal economies. The highly structured public health system was able to offer only rudimentary health promotion efforts.

Background to the New York State International Training and Research Program:

Recognizing the need for reform and restructuring SUNY Downstate took part in a March 1990 multi-institutional delegation to assess the state of Czechoslovak medical care and public health. By April 1991, following a memorandum of understanding, a formal exchange program was established between SUNY Downstate and Charles University in Prague. Even though HIV prevalence in the region was still relatively low in the 1990’s the NIH Fogarty AIDS International Training and Research Program emerged in 1993 to support research on HIV prevention and transmission. The NYS-ITRP was first formed to focus on HIV-related research training in Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary. In these early years, we worked extensively with the Czech National Institute of Public Health and the Polish National Institute of Hygiene Department of Epidemiology. Throughout the 1990’s there was a rapid development of educational interventions with adoption of harm reduction models as well as a development of clinical trials infrastructure.

By the early 2000’s Central Europe experienced an improvement in economic conditions along with stabilization of HIV rates and a development of internally funded research. However, the situation in Eastern Europe and Central Asia was challenged by burgeoning rates in injecting drug users (IDUs). In response to this growing epidemic NYS-ITRP began to focus operations on Eastern Europe, specifically the Baltics, Georgia, Armenia, and Russia. In 2010 with a new proposal we included Ukraine and Kazakhstan in our target countries. The program has evolved to include initiatives on emerging infections such as TB and a variety of new partnerships with in-country institutions.

Current Achievements, Challenges, and Future Directions
We are proud to say that our training efforts have made a measurable impact in the region. The vast majority of our trainees have returned to their home countries. We have had a total of 171 trainees and have held more than 60 short-terms in-country training course attended by over six thousand health care professionals. Our trainees have published over 700 books and journal articles and in over 200 they have been the first author. Many of our alumni have gone on to strong careers in public health and have promoted reforms and policy changes in their home countries. We have seen new schools of public health open in Kazakhstan, Georgia and Ukraine with which we have developed strong partnerships.

Even with the success of many of our training initiatives, there are still many challenges to overcome. There is a continued lack of understanding and support of public health as an academic discipline. The lack of English language skills can limit investigators in their access to international medical literature. Some existing in-country training and public health models can still be based on the Soviet model, which emphasizes expertise and experience over evidence-based medicine. Furthermore, challenges remain in the ability of trainees to advance professionally. We also face pressures from geopolitical tensions that undermine opportunities for regional training and collaboration.

In addition, epidemiological trends have presented challenges to combating the HIV epidemic. The IDU mediated HIV epidemic is evolving into a sexually transmitted epidemic one that includes both men who have sex with men and heterosexuals. Human rights have been challenged by legislation curtailing LGBT rights. There has also been a rapid rise of co-morbid conditions such as Hepatitis C and MDR TB (especially in Central Asia).

We recognize that we need to continue to combat these trends and we thank all of you for making the past twenty years special and successful. We are proud of all of our alumni and plan on continuing our US based and in-country training programs in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Georgia and Russia. As always we love to hear from all of you with any updates and we look forward to continued collaboration with our alumni.

**Our New and Returning Students**

While we have had a busy year with many in-country events including our 20th Anniversary Reunion celebration in Kyiv, we remain focused on our current Fogarty Fellows who are the core of our program. We are once again happy to report that the class of 2013 has a representative from each of our focus countries. All of them have unique research interest and backgrounds that we believe will lead them to exciting and productive careers. Please take a moment to read a little about each of them!
Eka Karkashadze MD received her Medical Doctorate from the Tbilisi State Medical School Faculty of Pediatrics in 2004. Since then she has gone on to work as an Epidemiologist in the Infectious Disease division of the AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center in Tbilisi, Georgia. After spending the summer in Tbilisi gathering data for her thesis project Dr. Karkashadze returned for the second year of her MS in Epidemiology degree at SUNY Albany. Her expected graduation date is May 2014.

Gaukhar Mergenova MD joins us from Almaty, Kazakhstan for the second year of her MS Epidemiology degree at SUNY Albany. She has worked with the Global Health Research Center of Central Asia (GHRCCA) as a Project Director and holds an MD from the Kazakh State Medical University. Upon her expected graduation in May 2014, Dr. Mergenova plans on returning to Almaty to continue her work with GHRCCA.

Roksolana Kulchynska MPH is a first year fellow pursuing an MS Epi degree at SUNY Albany. Ms. Kulchynska joins the program from Kyiv, Ukraine where she works for the AIDS Healthcare Foundation as a Prevention, Testing and Linkage Coordinator. She recently received a Masters of Public Health degree from the Kyiv Mohyla Academy and plans on completing her MS degree in 2014.

Ulan Kozhamkulov, PhD was most recently a research officer in the National Scientific Laboratory of Collective Use at the National Center for Biotechnology in Astana, Kazakhstan. Dr. Kozhamkulov has already completed a full calendar year in the advanced laboratory study program at the tuberculosis laboratory of the New York State Department of Health Albany, NY. He is continuing his studies for the 2013-2014 calendar years and has plans to resume his work in Kazakhstan after the completion of his program.

Julia Makarenko MPH joins us from Kyiv, Ukraine. Ms. Makarenko was previously working at the Ukrainian Institute on Public Health Policy where she is a Project Manager and Co-Investigator. Her research interests include Tuberculosis treatment adherence in substance using populations. She is in the first year of her MS Epi degree at SUNY Albany and plans on returning to Kyiv to continue her research at the conclusion of the program.

Polina Girchenko MA comes to us from St. Petersburg Russia as a first year Fellow in the MS Epi degree program at SUNY Albany. Ms. Girchenko holds a masters in sociology from the St. Petersburg State University. She has been working as a Project Manager at the Fund for Medical and Social Programs “Humanitarian Action.” Her research interests include studying substance users in St. Petersburg. Ms. Girchenko expects to complete her degree in May 2015 and return to St. Petersburg to continue her research with Humanitarian Action.
Workshops in Kiev!

In an ongoing effort to promote publishable research projects and improve research capacity in Ukraine, NYS-ITRP faculty travelled to Kiev in 2013 for a series of workshops. These events were intended to build on our previous workshop events in Kiev and were made possible through a generous PEPFAR supplement awarded to NYS-ITRP by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support HIV prevention interventions in Ukraine. The workshops were conducted in April, June and October. As a result we expect to see several projects ready for publication in the near future.

From April 25-26th we held the fourth installment of our popular Project to Presentation series. The workshop focused on further refining a draft papers for potential publication and presentation with the overall goal of moving project data into a publishable form. The workshop was designed for Ukrainian NGO project directors and researchers on projects related to HIV prevention, care, and surveillance. Participants were asked to make a 15-20 minute presentation, which was followed by a 10-15 minute faculty critique and analysis session for each project. Participants then edited their methods and results sections with the aid of US faculty. As many of the participants attended our previous research writing workshops it was exciting to see the progress they have made in their projects.

In addition to the abstract and project presentations, the workshop featured a number of lectures by US faculty. David Odegaard, MPH of SUNY Downstate Medical Center and Dr. Robert Kaplan, PhD of SUNY Stonybrook University gave presentations on research writing. Dr. Danielle Ompad, PhD of NYU Steinhardt, Dr. Michael Joseph, PhD, MPH of SUNY Downstate, with the other faculty assisted students in review and refinement of research proposals. As in previous editions of the workshop series, participants were able to get assistance on all aspects of their research project including data analysis.

From June 18-19 we returned to Kiev for an HIV Research Capacity Building Workshop. The workshop was designed for a broad audience of Kiev Mohyla School of Public Health students, Kiev research writing group trainees, AIDS Alliance members, and other NGO investigators from Kiev. The workshop goals included providing basic HIV research skills to junior investigators in an interactive format while fostering research collaborations and mentorships between trainees and faculty. We also recruited new Ukraine trainees for the next series of Kiev research writing workshops.

Since this event was held in conjunction with our Alumni Reunion[1] we were able to form a strong faculty that featured US faculty and also our former fellows who now hold professional positions in their home country. Former Fogarty Fellow Damir Bikmukhametov, MD, MS gave an interactive lecture on analysis of peer review literature, and the first day of the workshop was concluded by Fogarty alumni Baurzhan Zhussupov, MS, with a presentation entitled “Topics in Biostatistic Analysis: Propensity Score Analysis.” Dr. Michele Shedlin from NYU spoke about Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research.

Workshop participants and faculty reconvened on June 19th for another full day of presentations. Dr. Shedlin treated participants to a two-part lecture on using focus groups in research. Ms. Punkin Clay Stephens, PA, MPhil followed her presentations with a talk on using epidemiologic tools and clinical data to support
HIV prevention, planning, and research. The afternoon session featured a two-part talk on tobacco presented Dr. Tetiana Andreeva, MD, PhD (Kyiv-Mohyla Academy) and Dr. Jameela Yusuff, MD, MPH (SUNY Downstate). Dr. Andreeva was able to present a detailed talk on specific policy interventions in Ukraine related to tobacco control while Dr. Yusuff focused on smoking cessation interventions in HIV populations. The final presentation of the workshop was given by Dr. Dale Morse, MD, MS (Center for Disease Control). Dr. Morse spoke at length about the changing patterns of conducting food-borne outbreak investigations.

Our final workshop in Kiev, Ukraine featured one more installment of the Project to Presentation series. The event was held from October 25-26 with the goal of further refining participants’ HIV-related papers for potential publication and dissemination. All participants were expected to present abstracts. The workshop included writing exercises, small group discussions, and presentations on how to prepare manuscripts for publication. Participants were also advised on potential venues for publications.

The workshop was supported by many of the same faculty members who were with us for the April event. Dr. Robert Kaplan and Dr. Danielle Ompad were able to give participants advice on refining their manuscripts and working through paper revisions. Dr. Philip Alcabes, PhD, MPH, MA (Adelphi University) also assisted in manuscript review and discussion. In addition, participants heard presentations from Fogarty alumni Tetyana Vasylyeva and Alyona Mazhnaya. Ms. Vasylyeva presented her thesis project from her work at U Albany while Ms. Mazhnaya gave a talk of addressing reviewer’s comments on a submitted paper. Over the course of this workshop series we have witnessed a lot of growth in the presented projects and the skill set of the participating investigators. We look forward to our continued collaboration with them on their research projects.

Faculty Development Workshop Held in Almaty, KZ

In our continued commitment to expanding our collaborations in Kazakhstan, NYS-ITRP traveled to Almaty for the Kazakhstan School of Public Health Faculty Development Workshop. The workshop focused on providing faculty at the Kazakhstan School of Public Health (KSPH) with practical teaching tools for enhancing student learning, critical thinking, and productivity. The Global Health Research Center of Central Asia (GHRCCA) collaborated with NYS-ITRP to host this event. Over the span of the two-day workshop held November 11-12, 2013 participants heard lectures from US and Kazakh faculty members and also had the opportunity to experience new teaching methods firsthand.

The first day of the workshop started with opening remarks by the rector of KSPH, Dr. Zhanna Kalmatayeva and NYS-ITRP Director Dr. Jack DeHovitz. Their talk was followed immediately by several sessions on promoting critical thinking and processing small group activities. This series of lectures was given by Dr. Bill Roberson who is the founding director of the Institute for Teaching, Learning, and Academic Leadership at the State University of...
New York at Albany. His career in faculty development has focused on discovering and promoting ways of fostering reflective, critical thinking in adult learners and he regularly consults with US and international university faculty in a variety of disciplines. Dr. Roberson conducted his lectures in the same manner that he advocated in the content of his presentations. This meant that participants engaged in interactive activities, critical analysis, and small group exercises throughout the workshop. The workshop continued with a review of regional research project conducted by GHRCCA and the potential for KSPH collaboration. This talk was given by the Regional Director of GHRCCA in Kazakhstan, Dr. Assel Terlikbayeva.

The first day concluded with an overview of the current status and direction of the Kazakh Journal of Public Health given by Dr. Kalmatayeva.

On the second day, participants had a chance to hear a two-part interactive lecture on team-based learning from Dr. Roberson. Following lunch, Dr. DeHovitz gave an overview of the history, training initiatives, and accomplishments of NYS-ITRP. His talk was followed by a two-part session on biostatistical methods by Mr. Baurzhan Zhussopov who is a recent NYS-ITRP MS Epidemiology graduate. He is currently the Deputy General Manager at GHRCCA.

By the conclusion of the workshop, participants were able to examine the practices that inhibit student learning and experience teaching methods that engage and challenge students. They also developed strategies to help students direct their own learning and reviewed current regional HIV-related research projects including the current progress and goals for the Kazakh Journal of Public Health. The workshop received enthusiastic reviews from all of the participating KSPH faculty members. Many expressed the desire to rapidly implement the new training tools at KSPH. We look forward to continuing and strengthening our collaborations with KSPH and GHRCCA.

Trainee Spotlight:
Dr. Andrzej Zieliński

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

My immediate motivation was the urgent necessity to redirect my professional career when I exhausted opportunities to influence the activities of institution in which I was employed.

Problems of public health, and especially social determinants of access to medical care and motivation for health oriented behavior came to my awareness when I was working at Spelman Center for HIV-Related Disease at St. Clare’s Hospital in New York City. I had a feeling that the School of Public Health may give good opportunity to deepen those interests.

Last but not least was an acquaintance with Jack DeHovitz and Dale Morse whose
personalities and professional activities I valued highly and expected that the closer contact with them would be important to me for intellectual and personal reasons.

**What was your position before your training with NYS-ITRP?**

Directly before application for SUNY at Albany School of Public Health I was consultant of internal medicine in a large psychiatric hospital. Prior to that I was working in the AIDS Center in Warsaw as deputy director.

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

It was a very good start to learn about epidemiology. I have a very good memories of people especially Jack and Dale, but also Louise Mc Nutt and Dave Strogatz. In general it was a very good place with good people and interesting studies. One less pleasant experience was the aquarium in the Department of Computers with piranhas which were fed with live fish. After few months it disappeared.

**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?**

At the present time I am retired, but still working full time in the Department of Epidemiology engaging in some research programs and mostly in training people specializing in epidemiology. Before my retirement in 2010 I was head of the Department of Epidemiology and deputy director for research in National Institute of Public Health in Warsaw. I was also national consultant for epidemiology. Professionally I owe SUNY at Albany SPH more than a lot. Since 1999 my professional career was a direct continuation of my studies in Albany.

Several subsequent NYS-ITRP trainees came to work with you after you returned. How did the program enhance the control of infectious diseases in Poland

Those younger epidemiologists: Paweł Stefanoff, Magda Rosinska, Michał Czerwinski together with our new head of the Department of Epidemiology Małgorzata Sadkowska-Todys are the core of future condition of the epidemiology in my country. As a matter of fact we need more young people educated in the American Schools of Public Health who will return to Poland.

Right now they create methodological basis for epidemiology of infectious diseases in Poland. With satisfaction I witness actual visible results of their influence on the work of Sanitary-Epidemiological Stations.

**You recently attended the reunion in Kiev. What struck you about the program having been first involved in it many years ago.**

The most striking was the excellent quality of presentations which indicates high level of education of trainees. It was also a very friendly atmosphere which shows that alumni of SUNY at Albany SPH are like one family. Personally I was happy to meet my school teachers, all younger then I, whom I like and respect.

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**Dr. DeHovitz participates in MEDEA 2013 in Tbilisi Georgia**

The third annual MEDEA conference was held in Tbilisi on June 23-24th immediately following the NYS-ITRP meeting in Kiev. This conference brought together over 100 representatives of the Government of Georgia, UN, non governmental and private sector stakeholders as well as academic and public health professionals from the US, Europe and the Middle East to exchange ideas and information.
The conference’s origin was in Washington DC where it was first held in 2011 in partnership with the Embassy of Georgia and convened under the aegis of Sandra Elisabeth Roelofs, the First Lady of Georgia. The second meeting in 2012 was in Batumi. Dr. DeHovitz served on the organizing committee of the first conference. Tamar Tchelidze an NYS-ITRP graduate from the class of 2002 and currently the First Secretary in the Embassy of Georgia to the United States has played a key role in planning the MEDEA meetings.

The meeting served as a platform for sharing information and experience and helps engage Georgian medical professionals abroad in the ongoing reforms, policy dialogue and individual projects taking place in the national healthcare system in Georgia. Dr. DeHovitz discussed research collaborations available through international funding and chaired a session on research cooperation in communicable and noncommunicable disease. Other participants in the meeting included Ms. Roelofs, the Minister of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia (Dr. David Sergeenko), and Dr. Mariam Jashi, the Deputy Minister of Labour, Health and Social Affairs. Dr. Dale Morse, former co-director of the NYS-ITRP also participated in the meeting.

NYS-ITRP Holds Annual January Seminar

From January 16-18, 2013 NYS-ITRP hosted our current fellows at SUNY Downstate for our annual seminar. The seminar has traditionally been an important part of the fellowship program by allowing fellows to learn about the status, treatment and challenges presented by HIV/AIDS in New York. The three-day event included lectures by faculty members from various academic institutions throughout New York, clinic shadowing visits with clinicians at the HIV clinic, and presentations by Fogarty fellows.

The first day of the seminar featured a variety of speakers from SUNY Downstate. Fellows had a chance to hear about women and HIV interagency from STAR Program Research Director, Susan Holman. Her lecture was followed by a talk from Dr. Tracey Wilson on retention in care for people with HIV. The day concluded with several fellows shadowing clinicians in HIV clinic. Fellows had the opportunity to sit in on patient visits and learn about the operations and procedures of the clinic first-hand.

The second day of the seminar also gave fellows the opportunity to hear lectures on topics that are pertinent to the situation in their home countries. Dr. Anjali Sharma of SUNY Downstate gave a talk on Bone Density in IDU’s with HIV. Fellows also heard from Dr. Bruce Shackman from the Weill Cornell Medical...
College on Implementation Science and HIV. Following his talk, the fellows were asked to present at the HIV Seminar Series attended by SUNY clinicians and faculty. Their presentations focused on the status of HIV/AIDS in their home country and also provided an overview of some of their current research projects. After a long day of lectures and presentations, Dr. Jack DeHovitz hosted an evening social event for the fellows at his home.

On the final day of the seminar, the fellows were treated to another series of lectures. Dr. Sean Philpott once again traveled to Downstate from Union Graduate College to lead a session on ethical issues in research. Fellows had the opportunity to discuss their current research projects and determine some of the ethical issues that they will need to address. Dr. Jameela Yusuff from SUNY Downstate continued the lecture series with a presentation on HCV in Clinical Practice. Dr. Deb Gustafsen concluded the seminar with an interesting presentation on dementia and obesity in patients with HIV.

We are planning to continue to organize this annual event for all of our fellows receiving training in the US and we are already planning the next edition for January 2014. We believe that this event gives our fellows a unique opportunity to learn about HIV treatment in New York and provide them with information and models that can enhance care in their home countries. Stay tuned for the next edition of the NYS-ITRP Connections for a detailed review of next year’s event!
PUBLICATIONS


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