SANDRA ROELOFS, FIRST LADY OF THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA, VISITS DOWNSTATE ON HIV ANNIVERSARY DATE

The first lady of the Republic of Georgia, Sandra Roelofs, visited SUNY Downstate Medical Center on Monday, June 5th. A native of the Netherlands, she is an internationally recognized healthcare advocate for disadvantaged populations both in her adopted country and around the world. NYSITRP, along with Downstate’s Office for Institutional Advancement, hosted a reception luncheon for Ms. Roelofs, where she spoke with University President John LaRosa, Dean of the College of Medicine Eugene Feigelson, AITRP Director Jack DeHovitz, and other University officials.

She delivered a dynamic address to Downstate faculty, staff and students about public health issues facing Georgia, such as the spread of multi-drug resistant tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. She also thanked Downstate’s HIV Center for providing training and ongoing mentoring to Georgian HIV/AIDS specialists. NYSITRP has been training physicians and researchers from Eastern Europe and Central Asia since 1994. The program has trained more than 60 physicians from the region, including 18 Georgians.

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PROGRAM PARTNERS:
State University of New York
Downstate Medical Center, Brooklyn
School of Public Health, Albany
New York State Department of Health
Wadsworth Center, Albany
Division of Epidemiology, Albany

The New York State International Training & Research Program newsletter is a web-based (PDF) publication, and it is published twice a year.

We’d love to hear from you!

Please email Navin Dargani with updates on your work, such as new positions, grants awarded, conferences attended, honors & awards received, publications, presentations, as well as important life events.

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**15TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AIDS, CANCER AND PUBLIC HEALTH**

The NYSITRP participated in the 15th International Conference on "AIDS, Cancer and Public Health" in St. Petersburg, Russia from May 22-26, 2006. This annual conference is hosted by Dr. Andrei Kozlov and The Biomedical Center and is attended by over 300 people from multiple countries. NYSITRP-sponsored faculty included: Dr. Dale Morse, Director, Office on Science and Public Health, NYSDOH; Dr. Kirsten St. George, Director, Clinical Virology Program, Wadsworth Center, NYSDOH; and Dr. Angus Nicoll. Dr. Morse co-chaired the Symposium "Preparing for an Influenza Pandemic" and gave a presentation on "New York State’s Epidemiologic and Public Health Preparations for Seasonal and Pandemic Influenza" while Dr. St. George presented a talk on "Laboratory Preparedness for Pandemic Influenza in New York State" and Dr. Nicoll, Seconded National Expert, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) presented on "How the European Union is responding to Influenza: Seasonal, Pandemic and Avian". Dr. Morse also gave a presentation entitled "TB, MDR-TB and DOTS: the New York Experience" at an accompanying May 24-25 Symposium on Modern Strategies of TB Control.

**CONFERENCE OF HIV & SUBSTANCE USE HELD IN ST. PETERSBURG**

NYSITRP conducted a workshop from April 3-6, 2006 on “Conducting Research to Prevent HIV in Substance Users.” The meeting was held at Pavlov State Medical University and was organized in collaboration with the Biomedical Center in St. Petersburg. Faculty from National Development and Research Institutes (NDRI) lent their expertise in the field of substance use and HIV prevention research. The workshop aimed to stimulate participants to pursue research training opportunities through AITRP as well as foster scientific collaboration between Russian and US researchers.

The conference began with a comparison of HIV/HCV epidemiology among IDU’s in the US and Russia. Dr. Sherry Deren of NDRI then reviewed the existing HIV prevention mechanisms for drug users, while Dr. Anneli Uusküla of the University of Tartu cited successful examples of the same in Estonia. Dr. Andrew Rosenblum, also of NDRI, went on to discuss behavioral and pharmacological approaches to drug abuse treatment. On the third day of the meeting, qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were reviewed, followed by a workshop focused on applying these methods to grant proposals from a variety of funding sources. The conference participants and training faculty were equally excited about the possibility of collaborating on projects in the near future and some proposals are indeed underway.

**UPDATE: FROM THE INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE**

The 16th International AIDS Conference was held in Toronto, Canada from August 13-18. This year’s theme, Time to Deliver, is a statement that challenges us to broadly implement the scientific knowledge and tools that have been developed to fight HIV/AIDS over the epidemic’s twenty-five year course. More than 400 sessions, meetings and workshops took place over the six days of the conference, covering such topics as antiretrovirals in development, epidemiology, complications of HIV/HAART, Drug Resistance, and novel prevention strategies.

**SUNY Downstate Medical Center Reception**

Dr. Jack DeHovitz welcomed colleagues as well as current and former NYSITRP trainees at a reception in Toronto during International AIDS Conference. Present at the event were faculty from Fogarty International Center, Wadsworth Center at the New York State Department of Health, National Development and Research Institutes (NDRI), US Civilian Research & Development Foundation (CRDF), and SUNY Downstate Medical Center.

**Fogarty Trainees Present Research Findings at International AIDS Conference**

Dr. Anneli Uusküla, of the University of Tartu, presented the results of her research on estimating the IDU prevalence in Estonia using nationwide data sources. IDU’s face a high risk of HIV and accurate estimates of their prevalence are important to appropriately develop policies and programs to address their needs. Dr. Uusküla found an IDU prevalence of 2.4% in Estonia, consistent with experts’ predictions.

Dr. Dmitry Lioznov, of Pavlov State Medical University, reported the results of his study evaluating the relationship between knowledge of HIV transmission and sexual and drug-use risk behaviors.
among HIV-infected individuals receiving outpatient care in St. Petersburg. The spread of HIV infection in Russia has increased exponentially within the past decade, and epidemiologic evidence suggests heterosexual transmission is increasing. Dr. Lioznov found that HIV-infected individuals in St. Petersburg understand how HIV is transmitted, but continue to engage in high risk sexual behaviors, linked to ongoing alcohol and drug use.

Dr. Saulius Caplinskas, of the Lithuanian AIDS Center in Vilnius, presented on a number of significant topics including HIV transmission risk among prisoners in Lithuania, prevention of perinatal HIV transmission, and markers of risk behavior among IDU’s. Dr. Caplinskas also reported on the characteristics of HIV infection among women and MSM.

Dr. Andrzej Horban, of the Hospital of Infectious Diseases in Warsaw, Poland, gave a fascinating account of the prevalence of HIV drug resistance in Poland and the region at large, as well as the need for drug resistance testing as part of treatment regimens. Dr. Horban also reported on the short term prediction of clinical disease progression after starting cART, the high rate of negative tuberculin skin tests among HIV-positive patients who received BCG vaccines, and the tolerability and adherence to post-exposure prophylaxis of HIV infection in different exposure groups.

TRAINED SPOTLIGHT: MAGOMED NASHKHOEV

Magomed Nashkhoev, MD, MPH, worked as a dermatovenerologist at the Ministry of Health in the Russian Federation prior to his training at SUNY. After completing Fogarty fellowship in 2005, he accepted a position at AIDS Foundation East West in Moscow in line with his training in sexual risk behavior research.

1. What motivated you to pursue the Fogarty training program?

After I completed my training in Dermatovenerology, I was awarded an Edmund Muskie Graduate fellowship for 2 year of public health coursework in 2003. When I arrived at the University at Albany School of Public Health, I quickly realized that I wanted more in-depth training in infectious disease epidemiology and research methods. I also wanted to learn from New York State’s experience in fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic and bring this knowledge back to my home country. I then applied for a supplemental fellowship from Fogarty to finish my MPH and train in patient management and treatment adherence services.

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

I took very interesting courses like epidemiology, biostatistics, HIV/AIDS epidemiology, and environmental health. The coursework was very different than what I was used to in Russia: the information was more in depth and there was more interaction with professors. Also, I enjoyed being able to educate my classmates and even my professors by sharing my vision of problems in my home country and ideas for projects. It was a very positive experience that gave me a lot of new knowledge. It was also good to be in an academic environment as I attended conferences in Albany and in NYC.

Of course, it was a lot of fun outside the classroom as well. While I was in Albany I was manager of the University’s soccer team for international students. I also took Salsa classes and went to numerous parties and concerts. The student life at the University is great.

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I also had the opportunity to do rotations in clinics at SUNY Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn. I met many different doctors in different departments which was a very good learning experience. I also did my internship at SUNY Downstate under the guidance of Dr. Tracey Wilson. I worked on an Enhanced Adherence Project, where I was involved in questionnaire administration, data management and analysis of the program's impact.

3. What is the focus of your current work? How did your AITRP training prepare you for what you are doing now?

I currently work at AIDS Foundation East West, an NGO based in Moscow that deals with prevention of mother to child transmission and prevention of HIV among vulnerable populations such as prisoners. The organization is also involved with the development of HIV laboratories in Russia and harm reduction efforts.

My role in AFEW is that of Senior Program Advisor in the Department of Project Development. Some of our priorities are establishing HIV/AIDS counseling & prevention services and promoting friendly medical service in the region. Our programs include prevention of HIV/STD among adolescents in Kazakhstan, case management projects for vulnerable groups like sex workers, IDU’s, and prisoners in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In Russia, we are trying to develop HIV/AIDS counseling services in 10 districts. This program is challenging because counseling in Russia is limited as clinicians often leave for more lucrative administrative and the case-loads are often very high, leaving limited time.

The Fogarty program prepared me for my current position in that I am able to apply epidemiologic concepts, create evaluation and monitoring tools, prepare grant proposals, and utilize communication resources more effectively. Also, I learned about the multidisciplinary approach to fighting HIV/AIDS which is particularly important in Russia because policies, infrastructure, police work, education and health services are all tied together.

My experience with the Fogarty program has allowed me to take on one of my bigger current projects, whereby we test UNICEF HIV guidelines for young patients in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. This project entails our visiting various hospitals, clinics and ministries of health, teaching about the guidelines, and auditing and examining practices on a managerial and clinical. We also conduct focus groups and workshops with vulnerable groups to find out about their concerns and questions.

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

We recently submitted a proposal to the Europe WHO for an adherence program for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in Moldova. Moldova has separate centers for STDs and HIV, and there is poor communication between the two. Moreover, the HIV Center doesn’t provide treatment, only counseling. Misbeliefs and stigma also contribute to the underutilization of these facilities. Our proposal is to train and educate staff at the HIV center about treatment initiation and counseling, as well as to develop monitoring and evaluation tools for their use.

5. What is the hardest part about living in Albany? What about Russia?

Worst thing about Albany? The food! And the high prices for medical services. In Russia, the bad weather. More seriously, though, when implementing new programs people tend not to be receptive and feel interrupted from their routines. This is especially true if doctors perceive their prestige as being threatened. The politics surrounding HIV/AIDS field is also a challenge as the government is not very supportive of international organizations. For instance, Moscow’s municipal government recently blamed HIV service organizations for spreading sexually explicit materials.

6. What are some of your future plans?

I would like to develop more projects that target adherence and assemble a steering committee for case management for the region. I’d also like to bring in US collaborators with experience to train clinicians here. I see myself at AFEW for a long time, and I’d also like to develop a partnership with SUNY in order to strengthen the capacity in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.
TWO ALUMNI AWARDED GRANTS

Anneli Uusküla, MD, MS, PhD, of the University of Tartu in Estonia, was recently awarded a CRDF grant for her project, Development of an intervention/prevention to block transmission from injection drug users to their sex partners, culturally appropriate for ethnic and non-ethnic Estonians in Estonia. Among Dr. Uusküla’s collaborators on this project is Ms. Ave Talu, who recently completed a short term Fogarty fellowship in New York and has resumed her position at the Estonian Drug Monitoring Centre. The project will make use of qualitative and quantitative data to develop an intervention to prevent transmission of HIV from IDU’s to their sex partners, using culturally appropriate means for ethnic and non-ethnic Estonians in Estonia. Earlier studies have shown that sexual risk behavior among IDU’s is a potential source of HIV transmission to larger populations.

Dmitry Lioznov, MD, PhD, of Pavlov State Medical University (PSMU) in St. Petersburg, was recently awarded a Global Frameworks Planning Grant from the Fogarty International Center. This grant builds global health research capacity in low- and middle-income countries by supporting the development of innovative, multidisciplinary global health programs. Drs. DeHovitz and Morse will serve as advisors in the development of this program.

SUNY DOWNSTATE STUDENTS RECEIVE FOGARTY AWARDS

Christina Rager, an MD candidate at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, was recently awarded a Fogarty Ellison Grant which offers one year of mentored clinical research in a developing country. Christina has already begun her training at Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia in Lima, Peru and hopes to pursue a career that includes global health-related clinical research.

Mordechai Pavlovsky, MPH, a second year medical student at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, was awarded a NYSITRP travel grant to engage in a summer research project at Pavlov State Medical University in St. Petersburg. While there, Mr. Pavlovsky assisted Fogarty alumnus Dmitry Lioznov in the planning of a risk reduction study for persons with alcoholism. Mr. Pavlovsky also rotated in various infectious disease clinics, where he learned a great deal about the Russian health system, as well as the impact of HIV/AIDS in this region. Mr. Pavlovsky’s project was supported in part by a Fritz Fellowship from the Office of the President of SUNY Downstate Medical Center.

MAX SALFINGER

MAX SALFINGER, Director of the Clinical Mycobacteriology Laboratory at the NYSDOH Wadsworth Center and Professor of Biomedical Sciences at the University of Albany SPH has accepted a position as Bureau Chief of the Florida Department of Health laboratories. Dr. Salfinger has played an invaluable role in the NYSITRP, having served as a mentor to several trainees and participated in numerous workshops on TB/HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. He will be greatly missed, but we hope to continue our collaboration with him in his new capacity.

NAVIN DARGANI, Program Coordinator for NYSITRP, will be leaving the program in November to attend medical school in Grenada, West Indies. Navin joined us while pursuing an MPH at SUNY Downstate Medical Center and has since completed that degree. We wish him well in his future career as a physician. Until a replacement for him is found, please direct all program-related correspondence to David Odegaard at david.odegaard@downstate.edu.

Funding Opportunities

Fogarty International Research Collaboration Award (FIRCA) — This program provides funds ($32,000/year direct costs) 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 U.S. and foreign collaborators while increasing research capacity at the foreign site. All areas of biomedical and behavioral research supported by NIH are eligible FIRCA research topics, except for HIV/AIDS. For more information, visit www.fic.nih.gov/programs/research_grant/s/firc/index.htm. Submission deadlines: January 21st, May 21st & September 21st of each year for basic biomedical sciences, and September 21st of each year for behavioral and social sciences.

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 www.fic.nih.gov/programs/research_grant/s/grip/index.htm for more information. Submission deadlines for the biomedical sciences are on September 21st of each year for non-AIDS applications, and December 21st of each year for AIDS applications. For the social sciences, all applications are due September 21st of each year.
Edgar Manukyan, MD joins us from Armenia where he was a Laboratory assistant to the Chair of Dermatology, STI and Cosmetology at Yerevan State Medical University. Edgar is also a trainer in STI/HIV projects and has just begun his MS program in Epidemiology at UAlbany School of Public Health.

Tina Karapetyan, MD also from Yerevan State Medical University, works as a senior laboratory and research assistant at the Department of Epidemiology. She is looking forward to refining her epidemiologic research skills at the School of Public Health in Albany before returning to her position in Armenia.

Lilit Hovakimyan, MD, an Obstetrician-Gynecologist at the Center of Perinatology, Obstetrics and Gynecology in Yerevan, is also Clinical Manager at IntraHealth /Project NOVA. She is currently pursuing an MS in Epidemiology at the School of Public Health.

Roena Sukhiashvili, MS is training at New York State Department of Health's Wadsworth Center, with a focus on molecular methods in HIV/Hepatitis C. She is with the REA Rehabilitation Center in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Nikoloz Chkhartishvili, MD hails from the Infectious Diseases, AIDS & Clinical Immunology Research Center in Tbilisi, Georgia. He works as an Epidemiologist in the Department of AIDS Prevention and is currently in the MS Epidemiology program at UAlbany SPH.

Marina Topuridze, MD joins us from the Republic of Georgia's Maternal and Child Care Union. She works in the Department of Education and Information's program to prevent vertical transmission of HIV, and is undertaking the MS Epidemiology program at UAlbany SPH.

Lela Dzigua, MS is at the Virology Laboratory of The AIDS, Infectious Disease and Clinical Immunology Research Center in Tbilisi, Georgia. She is currently training at the Encephalitis lab at the Wadsworth Center.

Katya Chernjaeva, MS completed her graduate work in Biology St. Petersburg State University while working at the Laboratory of Molecular Virology in the Biomedical Center. She is pursuing laboratory training in TB at Wadsworth Center.

Katri Abel is a Specialist at the Drug Monitoring Centre in Estonia’s National Institute for Health Development. She is pursuing an MS in Epidemiology at UAlbany SPH.

SELECTED TRAINEE PUBLICATIONS


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