In October of last year, US investigators descended upon the beautiful city of Tbilisi to join their Georgian colleagues to celebrate five years of successful collaboration. The conference, entitled “U.S.-Georgia Biomedical Collaboration: Past Accomplishments, Current Status, and Future Regional Opportunities in the Caucasus,” took place from October 16-18th. The event created a unique opportunity to review past successes, discuss current health trends, and look forward to new collaborations. Successes include accomplishments in areas such as HIV/AIDS, emerging infectious diseases, TB, HCV, intravenous drug use and sexually transmitted diseases. Other public health concerns such as oncology, palliative care and tobacco use were also discussed.

The establishment of a comprehensive healthcare system is crucial to developing countries. Lack of access to funding and the most advanced medical research and technology can have a deleterious effect in areas that are experiencing soaring rates of infectious disease and rampant drug use. Indeed, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia cites goals the government has set in order to provide quality healthcare to all of its citizens, including the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, addressing and preventing drug abuse, measures to treat sexually transmitted disease monitor the blood supply and conduct mass vaccination programs, especially for children.

Eduard Shevardnadze, (former) President of Georgia, stated “Georgia, like many other developing nations, lacks adequate finances for reorganizing the healthcare system….we hope (the symposium) will serve as a cornerstone in combating global health problems such as HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, tuberculosis, oncological diseases, drug addiction and tobacco use that poses a deadly threat not only to the Georgian population but the nations across the world.”

Avtandil Jorbenadze, State Minister of Georgia, adds, “Georgia has still a long and difficult way to go on the path of building a truly democratic society whereas the existance of a contemporary health system is an essential attribute of such a society.” While Dr Jorbenadze graciously thanked American collaborators for their support, he extended his thanks to “medical scientists from Armenia and Azerbaijan participating in the symposium, expressing my strong belief that the meeting shall promote the development of regional cooperation and will play an important role in maintaining peace in the region.”

In addition to maintaining and strengthening existing relationships between Georgian and US collaborators, another major goal of this conference was to identify new collaborations and extend research opportunities into other Caucasus countries.

The symposium was sponsored by The Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of the Republic of Georgia and the Fogarty International Center (FIC) of the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). Other sponsors included U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation (CRDF), Biotechnology Engagement Project (BTEP), National Cancer Institute (NCI), and National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).

Dr. Jack DeHovitz (SUNY Downstate Medical Center), Dr. Dale Morse (NYS Department of Health) and Dr. Louise-Anne McNutt (SUNY School of Public Health) attended the conference.
When were you a trainee?
I graduated with an MS from the State University of New York at Albany’s School of Public Health in May 2003. My concentration was in epidemiology.

What was your thesis topic?
Treatment of sexually transmitted diseases in Estonia: consistency with the evidence based medicine principles.

What is your current institution?
I have two roles: a researcher in the Department of Public Health, University of Tartu. Also, as a lecturer in the Clinic of Dermatology, Foundation of Tartu University Clinics.

What are some projects you are working on?

Why did you become interested in working in the field of HIV/AIDS?
Well, by specialization I am a dermatovenerologist: a specialist responsible for STD care in Estonia. I became interested in epidemiology of STDs, possibly in relation to the explosive ‘outbreak’ of syphilis and other STDs in early 1990. One thing led to another; including a fruitful collaboration with Dr DeHovitz and other members of his department (Susan Holman, NP; Tracey Wilson, PhD) led to another scientific projects and I become a Fogarty trainee. Again, the IDU related epidemic in Estonia in early 2000-s led to new projects.

What are some grants you’ve applied for since you graduated, and were awarded?
Just recently, an Advanced In-Country Training Grant (sponsored by the Fogarty foundation) for “Study on injecting drug users’ syringes: detection of markers of HBV, HCV and HIV infections. Also, this year, I plan to do research in cooperation with the Estonian Health Development Institute. These are baseline, repeated behavioral surveys in sub-populations that are the target beneficiaries of Global Fund to fight against AIDS, TB and malaria programs. I am planning and designing HIV prevalence studies in target populations, and studies to estimate the size of populations of interest. I’ve applied for a grant from the NIH for “Screening for STDs using home sampling in Estonia.” This is through their program entitled Global Health Research Initiative Program for New Foreign Investigators. I recently received a grant from CRDF, which offered awards for collaborations in HIV/AIDS between US Scientists and FSU/Baltic countries. The name of my proposal is “Collaborative response to tackle HIV epidemic in Baltics: international and multidisciplinary workshop to prioritize areas and methods of research that are most essential and timely.” The conference will take place August 3-6, 2004.

What obstacles do you face in providing effective healthcare in Estonia?
Obstacles exist in providing healthcare and also in research: the evidence-based approach is still ignored and undervalued in day-to-day activities, personnel and co-workers lack up-to-date information and education and there is also a lack of an effective network of research and friendly collaboration in Estonia. Also, talented and qualified people in the fields of medicine and statistics are frequently employed by pharmaceutical or international companies (due to considerably higher salaries), so fewer people remain in government or academic settings.


Barbakadze G., Kamkamidze G., Butsashvili M., Kiladze M., Jatchvliani D. The role of specific CD4+ T helper cell response in the course of hepatitis C virus infection. Sb Lek. 2003;104(1):79-83


Recent Publications by Current/Former Trainees
Completion of the Fogarty Program

School of Public Health
Maia Kajaia, Georgia (MS)
Kartlos Kankazde, Georgia (MPH)
Gundegmaa Jaama, Mongolia (MPH)
Pawel Stefanoff, Poland (MS)

Lab Trainees
Natia Dvali, MD; Georgia
Oleg Sinyavskiy, MD; Kazakhstan
The Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation announces the availability of Requests for Applications (RFAs) for their 2004 and 2005 Programs. Applications are accepted from U.S. and international not-for-profit institutions. Detailed descriptions of their programs and downloadable RFAs are now available on the Foundation website: [www.pedaids.org](http://www.pedaids.org). Of particular interest are the following opportunities:

**2004 Two Year International Scholar Awards.** This is a postdoctoral fellowship for Developing Country Clinicians/Scientists providing 2 years of salary support, and up to $10,000 for supplies and travel. Letter of intent is due June 11, 2004.

**2005 International Leadership Awards:** This is a three-year award for Developing Country leaders in HIV/AIDS program implementation and research. Up to $450,000 in direct costs is provided for up to 3 years. Letter of intent is due June 11, 2004.

If you are interested in receiving further announcements from the Foundation, please send your email address to: Research@pedaids.org.

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**Fogarty Grant Opportunities**

**AIDS INTERNATIONAL TRAINING AND RESEARCH PROGRAM**  
**PA NUMBER:** PA-03-018

This RFA (Request for Applications) solicits applicants for advanced in-country training support. This award will support up to two years at $25,000, per supplemental application.

This information can be found at: [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-03-018.html](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-03-018.html). Look under the heading “Mechanism of Support.” Additional information containing instructions for supplemental applications can also be found in this document.

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**GRIP (Global Health Research Initiative Program for New Foreign Investigators)** is a Fogarty grant that provides an excellent opportunity for trainees returning to their home country to enhance their scientific research. Upon completion of research, investigators will have the tools to continue to pursue fruitful research and lead productive careers, including expert training, consultation or research related to biomedical issues within their home institutions.


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The Fogarty International Research Collaboration Award (FIRCA) is open to all Trainees and their US Principal Investigators. The grant is awarded to the US based institution that will work directly with the Fogarty trainee and their home institution. All biomedical and behavioral research topics supported by the NIH are eligible for inclusion. Website: [http://www.fic.nih.gov/programs/firca.html](http://www.fic.nih.gov/programs/firca.html). Deadlines are November 25, March 25 and July 25. Please keep in mind that FIRCA is not AIDS related grants.

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Pawel Stefanoff (MS candidate, SUNY School of Public Health) recently presented two abstracts which were accepted for the 2004 ICEID conference (held this year in Atlanta, Georgia).

♦ Stefanoff P, Rosinska M, Jarzabek Z. Factors influencing risk of poliovirus reemergence in Poland.
♦ Stefanoff P, Zielinski A, Eidson M, Morse DL. Case ascertainment of tick-borne encephalitis in Poland.

Also....


♦ 14th European Congress of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Disease, Prague, Czech Republic, May 1-4, 2004. Beran O, Lawrence D. Drug Modulation of Toll-like Receptors (TLR) Expression in Human Macrophages Stimulated by LPS and Bacteria.

♦ 11th International Congress of Infectious Disease, Cancun, Mexico, March 4-7, 2004. Beran O, Holub M, Hnykova J, Rozsypal H, Spala J. Expressions of CD38 Antigen on CD8+T lymphocytes in HIV-1 Infected Adults: The Czech Prospective Study.

The New York State International Training and Research program is sponsored by the Fogarty International Center and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The program is cooperatively administered by the Wadsworth Center and Division of Epidemiology, New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) at Albany, the Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, and the School of Public Health at Albany, the State University of New York.

Please keep in touch!
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Important Websites:
www.downstate.edu/hiv/p3a.html
www.health.state.ny.us
www.wadsworth.org/educate/educate.htm
www.albany.edu/sph/
www.fic.nih.gov/index.html