In October 2005, US AITRP investigators hosted a workshop on operations research geared towards health care professionals from Georgia and Armenia. The “US-Caucasus Workshop on Operational Research in HIV, TB and Infectious Diseases” was held in Tbilisi from October 24th – 27th, and was co-sponsored by the Fogarty New York State International Training and Research Program and Emory University School of Medicine. The focus of the symposium was the role of operational research methods in mitigating the burden of HIV, TB and infectious disease. The theme was particularly salient given the developing healthcare infrastructure in the Caucasus and the high prevalence of HIV, TB and ID in the region.

Operational research stresses the efficient allocation and use of resources in healthcare provision and management. The conference began with an overview of these and other relevant concepts as they relate to HIV and TB prevention. Attendees then had the opportunity to participate in a workshop to develop an operations research project in TB control. Workshops on grant preparation and IRB challenges were also held. The conference stimulated lively discussion and the participants demonstrated a high interest in the subject.

US faculty who were present at the conference include Dr. Jack DeHovitz (SUNY Downstate Medical Center), Dr. Dale Morse (New York State Department of Health), Dr. Louise-Ann McNutt (University at Albany - School of Public Health), Dr. Wayne Triner (Albany Medical College), Dr. Kenrad Nelson (Johns Hopkins University – School of Public Health) Drs. Carlos del Rio, Henry Blumberg, and Michael Leonard (Emory University School of Medicine), and Dr. Deborah McFarland (Rollins School of Public Health). Dr. Tengiz Tsentsvadze, Director of the Georgian AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center and a former New York State International Training Program trainee, collaborated with the US faculty in mounting the symposium, which was attended by 20 Georgian and 10 Armenian health care professionals. US faculty also had the opportunity to meet with the First Lady of the Republic of Georgia who has a keen interest in public health initiatives related to the prevention and treatment of HIV and infectious disease. Drs. DeHovitz and Morse were also able to meet with 20 prospective trainees from Georgia and Armenia. We look forward to working with these highly impressive Fogarty candidates soon!
1. What motivated you to pursue the New York State International Training Program?

I started my career as a resident gynecologist treating women with reproductive health issues. I acquired even greater exposure to the severe reality of health problems in various regions of my country, especially issues of reproductive health along with substantially increasing rates of emerging and re-emerging infections, such as STIs and HIV/AIDS after joining the US Peace Corps in Armenia. At that point I realized that there was no public health system in the Republic of Armenia and the country was experiencing a great lack of public health practitioners. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Armenia inherited remainders of the Soviet health system. The old highly centralized, “vertical” system was broken and a new one was in its embryonic stages of development. Realizing the great need, I decided to apply for a graduate program in Public Health. The program funded my participation in a number of training courses and conferences, which were relevant to my academic interests and work.

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

I am currently working for IntraHealth as an overall Program Manager for a USAID funded national project to improve quality of reproductive health services in the Republic of Armenia. My position requires strong managerial ability but also significant research and technical skills. I obtained all these during my training. The major strength of the program, in my opinion, is provision of various training and research opportunities with incredibly wise and supportive mentorship for the fellows. The AITRP training was invaluable experience in my professional career.

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

For me, the hardest part about living in Albany was being far from my parents and relatives back in my homeland. But it certainly helped a great deal that I could have the members of my own family with me during the training years. The toughest part about living in Armenia is the lack of professional opportunities. The job market is very narrow and there are very limited chances for professional growth.

6. What are some of your future plans?

My future plans include improving my academic and research skills further to be able to bring major research initiatives to my homeland. My long-term professional goal is establishment of a strong surveillance system for infectious diseases in the Republic of Armenia.
TWO ALUMNI RECEIVE CRDF GRANTS

Dmitry Lioznov, MD, PhD, of Pavlov State Medical University in St. Petersburg, Russia, first trained with the New York State International Training Program in the summer of 2003. Dr. Lioznov, in collaboration with NYS ITRP faculty member, Don Des Jarlais, PhD, was recently awarded a grant entitled Alcohol Brief Interventions among HIV High Risk Population. The study’s objective is to estimate the impact of a brief intervention on decreasing self-reported sexual risk behavior and alcohol use among former intravenous drug users (IDUs). Alcohol use is known to be a cofactor of sexual transmission of HIV, yet little is known about its consumption patterns among IDUs and whether interventions aimed at reducing alcohol use can also reduce HIV risk behavior. We look forward to hearing the results of this significant and timely study.

Tengiz Tsertsvadze, MD, PhD, Director of Georgian AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center, was awarded a grant to assess the Prevalence of HIV subtypes and Genotypic Drug Resistance among Antiretroviral Treatment Naive Recent HIV Seroconverters and Chronically Infected Individuals and in Treatment Experienced Patients. Genotypic resistance testing is a useful prognostic tool to help therapeutic decisions. As well, the study marks the first time ART resistance will be studied in Georgia. Knowledge of the regional prevalence of drug resistant HIV will help optimize antiretroviral treatment effectiveness in the country. Jack DeHovitz, MD, MPH serves as US Principal Investigator on this study.

GARDNER MIDDLEBROOK AWARD

Max Salfinger, MD, of the Laboratory of Mycobacterial Disease at New York State Department of Health’s Wadsworth Center, received the Gardner Middlebrook Award at the 26th Annual TB Dinner, in Atlanta, Georgia, on June 6, 2005. The award, presented during the annual meeting of the American Society for Microbiology, honors distinguished researchers for their significant contributions to mycobacteriology. Its namesake, Dr. Middlebrook, was a pioneer whose scientific landmarks included methods to more rapidly and accurately detect mycobacteria, and elucidation of drug-resistant M. tuberculosis strains.

2005 Best Places to Work

For the second year in a row, New York State Department of Health’s Wadsworth Center was named one of the Best Places to Work in Academia by The Scientist. Wadsworth Center was ninth among the 91 U.S. universities and institutions ranked, and the only government institution acknowledged in the publication’s top 10. The magazine for life scientists asked researchers to assess their institutions for working conditions considered important for scientists, including 41 criteria in eight areas. Respondents overall rated relationships with their peers, a sense of accomplishment in their work, and access to research resources as components of a great workplace. Earlier in 2005 Wadsworth also was named one of the Best Places to work for Postdocs.
Ave Talu serves as the Head of the Estonian Drug Monitoring Center and the Estonian REITOX National Focal Point. For her Fogarty fellowship, Ms. Talu is currently receiving behavioral research training in substance use and HIV prevention at National Development and Research Institutes (NDRI) in New York City.

George Kambamidze holds positions at the Department of Clinical Immunology of REA Rehabilitation Center and the Department of Allergy and Clinical Immunology of Tbilisi State Medical University in the Republic of Georgia. Dr. Kambamidze previously trained with us in molecular virology, and is currently in a certificate program in Biostatistics at the University at Albany – School of Public Health.

Maia Butsashvili, a returning Fogarty fellow, hails from the Department of Infectious Diseases at REA Rehabilitation Center and also serves on the NGO Maternal and Child Care Union in the Republic of Georgia. Dr. Butsashvili is pursuing a PhD at the University at Albany – School of Public Health, and is particularly interested in the prevention of vertical transmission of HIV.

Marine Karchava, of the AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center in Georgia, was awarded a Young Investigator Award to attend the 13th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI), which was held from February 5-8, 2006 in Denver, Colorado. Dr. Karchava presented on the Prevalence of ART Resistance Mutations in HIV Proviral DNA from Infected Infants Diagnosed in New York State, 2001-2002. She is currently training with Dr. Monica Parker at Wadsworth Center, NYS Department of Health.

We are excited to announce an upcoming workshop entitled “Conducting Research to Prevent HIV in Substance Users” from April 3 – 6, 2006 at Pavlov State Medical University, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation. This conference is designed to introduce the basic concepts of HIV prevention research in substance users to an audience of researchers, scientists, and physicians. National Development and Research Institutes (NDRI) is a training partner in AITRP, lending expertise in the field of substance use and HIV prevention research. NDRI associated faculty will conduct this workshop in collaboration with faculty from Pavlov University and the Biomedical Center.
SELECTED TRAINEE PUBLICATIONS


Babayan, K. "Our Strategy Of Treatment Of Skin, Hair And Nails Fungal Diseases." Caucasian Dermatology And Venereology 1: 2005; 52 - 55.

Babayan, K. "The Role Of Mycoplasma Hominis And Ureaplasma Urealyticum In The Development Of Vaginal Bacteriosis." South Caucasian Dermatology And Venereology 1:2005; 40 - 42.

Babayan, K. "Family Medicine And Dermatovenereological Problems." South Caucasian Dermatology And Venereology 1: 2005; 32 - 34.


SELECTED TRAINEE PUBLICATIONS


