

# Road to Results

ACHIEVING SUCCESS STEP BY STEP

## Promoting Rational Drug Use: The Drug Information Center of Tajikistan

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*“During this period of transition, our country is faced with crucial problems related to provision of and accessibility to quality drugs. Solving these problems is one of the objectives of pharmaceutical sector reform. The present information channels do not meet demands of health care system and health workers do not have access to updated, independent, and reliable pharmaceuticals information. The Drug Information Center was established to meet these needs, by providing information to health care workers, students, pharmacists, and physicians on rational drug use, the formulary system, and pharmaceutical data, through workshops and counseling for health care workers.” – Matluba Naknazarova, DIC Clinical Pharmaceutical Expert*

As Tajikistan transitions to a more market based economy, private sector enterprises have rapidly sprung-up. In the pharmaceuticals market this means that thousands of new drugs are continuously making their way to consumers, often without going through the legally-required registration process. The de facto lack of regulation makes it difficult for both doctors and patients to select safe and effective drugs.

To address this and related issues, Tajikistan’s Drug Information Center (DIC) was established in December 2003 with technical and financial support from the USAID-funded ZdravPlus project and in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Tajikistan (MOH) and the Tajikistan State Medical University. The main objective of the DIC is the promotion of rational drug use, with a foundation in evidence-based medicine (EBM), with the ultimate goal of ensuring that only safe, effective medicines are being used.

In just its first year of existence, the DIC has been extremely active, working closely with the MOH to improve knowledge of pharmaceuticals and their use throughout the country. Through training seminars for existing and future health care workers and information dissemination, including a drug bulletin, informational flyers, and creation of a falsified drugs list, the DIC is getting information out to pharmacists, health care workers, and patients. This is especially important in Tajikistan, as elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, where drug advertising is plentiful, and doctors are not in the habit of

doing their own research on drugs and their use and, often, do not have access to this type of information due to lack of Internet skills and English language ability. The DIC helps bridge the gap by opening doctors’ minds to EBM, encouraging them to think critically about the advertising they receive, and making sure that understandable, accurate information is disseminated.

Use of EBM helps the DIC get its message across to doctors. During a seminar on rational drug use at the Sogd Oblast Hospital in Khojand, the DIC cited evidence-based information showing that Methomezole, an analgesic, had been shown to have many adverse side effects. The response from the participating doctors was overwhelming, as DIC specialist Jamilya Anvarova notes, “all at once, the doctors said that they had used this drug for years and never known how harmful it



*The Tajikistan Minister of Health (far right) and George Deikun (center) Officially Open the DIC*



The USAID-funded ZdravPlus Program provides technical assistance and training to improve the health of Central Asian populations by improving health delivery systems

was.” During follow up visits to the hospital, the doctors have said that they are no longer prescribing this drug, and asked the DIC to make sure to keep supplying them with evidence based information, not only so that they can better treat their patients but also so that they can better take care of their own health. The DIC also holds seminars for medical and nursing students to educate them on these issues before they even begin to practice.

The Drug Bulletin, published once every two months, and the more frequent one-page flyers, which have distributed to hospitals, government offices, NGOs, and other organizations, get drug information out to a wider audience. The three issues of the drug bulletin already in distribution update the medical community on a variety of drug related problems: past topics have included Injection Use, Rational Antibiotic Use, and Evidence Based Medicine. The Center has also produced and distributed more than 20 different one-page flyers on key topics identified by health care workers and medical students as important, including rational drug use, the essential drug list, drug side effects, drugs and pregnancy, and drugs and food among other topics. These printed materials are especially important for those health care workers located out side of Dushanbe who have limited resources and limited access to up-to-date drug information.

The DIC is also open to the public and medical professionals who can come and get important information on particular drugs. Dr. Zoya Markovka, for example, writes a regular magazine column to inform the population about health topics, and regularly visits the DIC for information. She even came recently to get advice on medication for a relative, after discovering that

the medicine the relative was using was on the falsified drugs list.

The falsified drugs list is one of the most notable achievements of the DIC during the past year. The list, with over 100 entries, inventories unregistered drugs on the market, which are not what they claim to be and are often ineffective and dangerous. The MOH was so startled by this information— the sheer number of poor quality drugs readily available in Tajikistan’s drug stores— that they issued a *prikaz* requiring that the list must be displayed in all of the capital’s pharmacies. By all accounts, the list has been posted in city pharmacies in visible locations, and pharmacists know what the list is and that drugs on the list should not be sold.

An important key to the initial success of the Drug Information Center has been its close collaboration with the Ministry of Health. The MOH has been extremely supportive not only of the falsified drugs list, but of the DIC’s work, providing space for the Center in the Tajik State Medical University— which provides access to medical students, some of whom have chosen to volunteer at the Center. The MOH also helps the DIC with distribution of its drug information publications and the MOH and DIC are currently working together on compilation of Tajikistan’s first Drug Formulary.

As the DIC prepares to celebrate its first birthday, at the beginning of December, the Center is looking at new ways to get information on rational drug use out to the public. The Center is preparing short radio programs and negotiating for air time to get key messages on rational drug use directly to the population. The Center’s plans also include increasing emphasis on work with physicians outside the capital.

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