

Road to Results

ACHIEVING SUCCESS STEP BY STEP

Interpersonal Communication Skills Training for Medical Care Providers in Kazakhstan: Opening Minds and Building Bridges with Patients

March 2004

In Kazakhstan today, reforms are changing the health care system. Increased emphasis on preventative care and increased responsibility on the population for taking care of its own health, means that doctors and nurses are increasingly required to educate patients to monitor their own conditions and know when to seek treatment from a medical professional. All of this has placed new demands on doctors and nurses to improve their abilities to communicate with the population.

As Ludmila Astashkina, Director of the Kazakhstan Association of Family Physicians (KAFP) branch in Pavlodar and former Head Doctor at a Pavlodar family group practice (FGP) explained, formerly doctors had the attitude that, "I am the doctor, I know best, and you will do as I say because I have a lot of work experience and everything that I say is correct." Good bedside manner was not something doctors were educated to think about.

In 2002, in an effort to assist health care professionals in meeting the changing needs of their environment, the USAID-funded ZdravPlus Project began creating a network of trainers in interpersonal communication (IPC) skills throughout Central Asia. IPC training covers many topics, including:

- understanding one's own values and how they influence the doctor's perception of patients;
- listening to patients;
- getting messages across to patients and checking comprehension;
- making the patient feel comfortable;
- creating a positive atmosphere and determining whether or not a patient is satisfied with his/her visit; and
- using and understanding both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Developing a Cadre of Trainers

Four Master Trainers from Central Asia were initially prepared by international consultant Dr. Lynne Cogswell in November 2002 at the request of ZdravPlus. Two of them were from Kazakhstan and in the months that followed, an additional Master Trainer from Kazakhstan was also trained.

In addition to the Master Trainers who are qualified to conduct trainings of trainers (TOTs), a total of eight Kazakhstan trainers have been prepared in Karaganda, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Zhezkazgan, and Almaty to conduct IPC trainings for doctors, nurses, and midwives throughout the country. To date, over 300 medical professionals have taken part in IPC trainings and are now using their newly-acquired skills on a daily basis. Countless patients are benefiting from the improved bedside manner and communication skills that these doctors and nurses are using in their daily interactions with the public.



Training of Trainers (TOT)

In a 10-day TOT conducted in Almaty by Lynne Cogswell, the four initial candidates for IPC Master Trainers and 17 additional trainees including health care workers, representatives of health NGOs such as KAFP, staff from the Center for Healthy Lifestyles, and representatives from the health sectors of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan learned the nuts and bolts of interpersonal



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

communication and how to run trainings for medical professionals. They worked through case studies aimed at helping them put the strategies into real-life context. During three days of the TOT, they tested their training skills with a live audience of health care workers and devoted one entire day to adapting the course to local conditions in Central Asia.

Trainers from Kazakhstan have gone on to train their colleagues from family group practices, maternity homes, and other medical facilities. Participating health care workers have shown great improvement in their knowledge of IPC before and after the trainings. In Semipalatinsk, for example, in a training conducted for 20 doctors from FGPs, the average pretest score was 33 percent, while the average final score was 95 percent, with eight participants obtaining a perfect score of 100 percent on the post-test. Similar results were seen in Karaganda, with a 34 percent average pretest score and a 97 percent average post-test score.

The real test, however, comes in the examination room. While doctor-patient confidentiality makes it difficult to monitor the use of IPC skills on the job, anecdotal evidence shows that doctors are using their skills to understand their patients better and get their messages across more effectively.

“It is important to me that I need to speak simply and understandably, to think about my body language and to understand the patient’s body language,” notes Family Practice Nurse Elena

Kakhno of Zhezkazgan. Adds her colleague, Valentina Kurnakova of KAFP in Zhezkazgan, “Before, I didn’t always listen [to the patient] until the end. I sometimes interrupted. Now I watch myself... I take a chair, I sit down, I put my hand on his, I have a real conversation with him...”

Doctors are extremely appreciative of the trainings and see their value in the larger context. After receiving training in IPC, the head nurse of the Zhezkazgan Maternity Hospital requested that IPC training be conducted for all gynecologists and midwives who work in the hospital.

The Future of IPC Skills Training

Trainings for doctors and nurses in the ZdravPlus pilot sites are expected to continue. Through a joint USAID-ExxonMobil supported project, over 100 doctors representing all of Astana’s FGPs, as well as Polyclinic #2, will receive IPC training in 2004. Additionally, a TOT is planned for later in 2004 for KAFP branch representatives so that KAFP will have the capacity to provide training in IPC to FGP medical personnel in 11 oblasts.

It is envisioned that through the growing network of trainers, the number of medical professionals with training in IPC will continue to grow—thus improving the efficacy of interactions between medical professionals and patients throughout the country. “In some other countries, IPC skills are part of the medical school curriculum,” explained Master Trainer Irina Yuzkaeva of ZdravPlus, “and we hope that will happen here someday as well.”

For more information

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