

# Road to Results

ACHIEVING SUCCESS STEP BY STEP

## Integrating Training Courses into the Curriculum of Medical Institutes in Uzbekistan: Educating Thousands of Medical Students Sooner and More Efficiently

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Three years ago, staff at the USAID-funded ZdravPlus Project developed and began to teach short, practical and up-to-date courses for doctors on key health topics in rural pilot regions of Uzbekistan. Topics for short courses were selected based both on health statistics, including mortality and morbidity rates, and on requests from local health care workers. Topics included an Anemia/Rational Nutrition module and the World Health Organization's (WHO) approved course on "Integrated Management of Childhood Illness" (IMCI) for managing five common, yet possibly life-threatening, conditions in children under age five. Over time, doctors working in every rural clinic in the eight districts of Ferghana Oblast were trained by ZdravPlus.

As ZdravPlus began to look at the future of such training programs, it became clear that in the long term, these training courses for rural doctors would only continue as long as ZdravPlus supported them financially. Therefore, a local mechanism of support for training was essential if they were to continue.

Prompted by advice from general practitioner (GP) trainers, ZdravPlus decided that the best way to ensure sustainability of these training courses was to integrate them into the curriculum of medical institutes nationwide. Additionally, it was clear that by introducing the courses into medical institutes, training could be cascaded out to many more medical students and staff than could possibly be accomplished by ZdravPlus working in isolation. Supporting this idea, a GP trainer from Andijon commented, "The educational system inherited from the USSR in Uzbekistan could no longer provide up-to-date knowledge in medicine. Unfortunately, some doctors are still using outdated methods in treating many diseases. That's why it is very important to introduce WHO and evidence-based methods into the curriculum of the medical institutes."

Thus, the decision was made to begin integrating these modules into the training programs for all medical students throughout the country. In 2003, ZdravPlus began the task of training staff at each medical institute. Training of the existing GP trainers was a priority, since their training through the World Bank "Health" Project had introduced them to modern ideas and participative teaching practices.



*Coursework on Anemia/Rational Nutrition and IMCI helps prepare the next generation of doctors*

The courses use participatory, practical, challenging and competency-based techniques to stimulate new ideas in order to improve the quality of training. The content is evidence-based, up-to-date, adapted to fit the specific needs of Uzbekistan and relevant for family doctors—all of which are elements that need more focus in medical education facilities. Also, the curriculum modules have been written up and detailed—something teachers have especially appreciated, as they did not have comprehensively written curricula for their own teaching programs.

### **Early Results of Institutionalization**

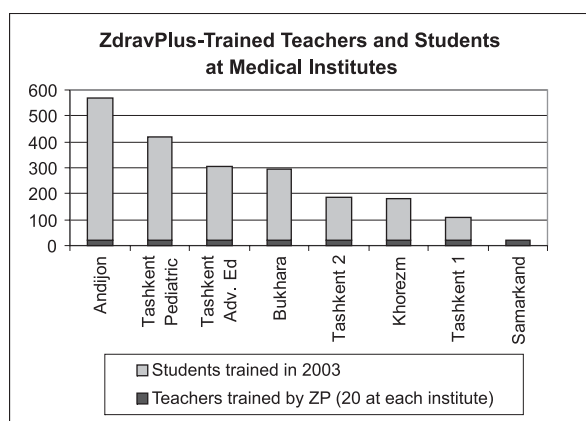
Results so far have showcased the wisdom of this strategy. Within a year, nearly 2,000 students in seven medical institutes have received training in these short-course modules. Additionally, the ideas inherent in the training program have proven valuable to the teachers themselves. As one teacher at the Second Tashkent Medical Institute told ZdravPlus, "ZdravPlus' first step of



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

institutionalizing the IMCI and Anemia/Rational Nutrition modules into our medical institute played a critical role in changing the thinking of both students and teachers.”

As shown in the chart below, an initial investment by ZdravPlus in training 160 trainers (20 trainers at eight institutes) has resulted in a further 1,926 students being taught. By comparison, before institutionalization of the training courses, ZdravPlus was able to finance and train 950 doctors in rural areas over the course of the past three years. Now, remarkably, in just one year close to 2,000 students have received training at institutes nationwide.



Students of the Andijon Medical Institute are enthusiastic about the courses noting that, “None of our courses during our whole medical education program were as interesting and exciting as this one. Compared to the boring lecture style we are used to, new teaching methods like role-plays, group discussions, case-studies, and seeing patients everyday encouraged us not only to listen but also to actively participate in the course. Even though we have taken courses in pediatrics during our medical education, we still learned a lot and gained practical skills from the IMCI course. This will

definitely help us when we start working as General Practitioners.”

Another medical student points out the importance of learning proper, rational nutrition in the prevention and treatment of priority problems among women and children in Uzbekistan such as anemia, iodine and vitamin A deficiency and adds, “Moreover, we have learned about new evidence-based information and WHO approaches in the treatment of those diseases.”

The most influential time for training doctors in good medical practices is while they are still medical students. Without effective input at this stage, an opportunity is missed and educators face an uphill battle to improve the care provided by medical staff. By institutionalizing the modules, ZdravPlus has taken a major first step towards reforming the health education system of the country.

### **Additional Health Courses in the Works**

Early results from those areas where training has taken place show that there are significant improvements in the care offered by health care workers trained in these modules. In addition, as medical institutes become more aware of the new teaching methods involved, there is a growing demand to introduce more courses of similar nature. In response, ZdravPlus is currently preparing additional materials for postgraduate training of healthcare workers in Health Management, Family Planning, Hypertension/ Cardiovascular Risk, Basic Laboratory Diagnostic Techniques and Interpersonal Communication.

The long-term goal is to develop and integrate such courses into the graduate level, where habits learned last a lifetime—and where positive input will leave a lasting impact on the health care of the population of Uzbekistan.

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