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TURKMENISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Strengthening Laboratory Services

Training program in Turkmenistan links Family Physicians with Laboratory Specialists



Photo: ZdravPlus

Participants in the ZdravPlus joint laboratory/ primary health care hematology training.

Family physicians and laboratory physicians are working together to diagnose anemia more effectively on the primary health care level and to ensure that patients receive the care they need to improve their condition.

A six-year-old boy from Lebap Velayat, Turkmenistan, was recently taken to his family physician by his parents, who were concerned by their son's lack of appetite and lethargic behavior. After being referred to a specialist for consultation, his parents were shocked when they were told by oncologists that their son had leukemia. Understandably distraught, they sought a second opinion. Saodat Romanova – a laboratory physician at House of Health #5 in Turkmenabat – was able to give his parents much better news. After reevaluating the laboratory tests, Ms. Romanova determined that the boy was indeed sick. However, his lethargy and lack of appetite were the result of anemia, a relatively common and easily treatable condition. Ms. Romanova was able to quickly reverse the original diagnosis and was confident in the accuracy of her diagnosis – due in large part, she says, to her participation in a USAID ZdravPlus Project training course on hematology for laboratory and family physicians.

The USAID ZdravPlus Project has been working since 2002 to strengthen the capacity of laboratory workers in Turkmenistan's health care system. Even when laboratories provide the highest quality of service, their efforts are only useful to patients when family physicians order the right laboratory tests, make correct diagnoses, and prescribe the most appropriate treatment. ZdravPlus is strengthening the link between laboratory and family physicians in an innovative health systems approach to education.

The ZdravPlus training module emphasizes the relationship between family physicians and laboratory specialists, with a focus on how the two groups should work together to ensure that appropriate blood tests are performed and interpreted correctly. The process promotes a better understanding of the complementary role that doctors and laboratory technicians play in the health care system. Because both groups are able to put their new skills into practice in a mutually supportive fashion, careful laboratory analysis, and evidence-based diagnosis and treatment are now linked, ensuring better health outcomes for all.