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UKRAINE

SUCCESS STORY

Doctors Learn HIV/AIDS Counseling

Doctors learn about HIV/AIDS voluntary counseling and testing



Photo: PATH

Dr. Skripka, right, practices counseling skills at a training session in Mykolayiv.

“In my clinic, we conduct HIV post-test counseling very often. No matter how long you have worked in this area, it’s still very hard to be the one to inform a young pregnant woman about her HIV-positive status,” said Dr. Skripka.

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For many years, the overwhelming majority of HIV cases in Ukraine were among men. Now, about 40 percent of known cases are among women. Over the five years ending in 2003, the prevalence of HIV infection among pregnant women had more than tripled. In 2004, the mother-to-child transmission rate was estimated at 10 percent.

Many women do not learn that they are HIV-positive until they are pregnant, in part because most medical facilities in Ukraine do not provide voluntary counseling and testing services. USAID is striving to change that. In coordination with the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, USAID is equipping medical staff in Ukraine with the skills to give more people voluntary testing and to decrease mother-to-child HIV/AIDS transmission.

The project trains obstetricians and midwives in voluntary counseling and testing services. It also works to strengthen community-based support for HIV-positive pregnant women and mothers in Mykolayiv, Odessa, Sevastopol, and Crimea.

When a USAID-supported voluntary counseling and testing training was announced in Mykolayiv, Dr. Antonina Skripka was eager to participate. She joined 18 other obstetricians and midwives in a three-day training covering HIV transmittal and infection as well as the stigma and discrimination that many people living with HIV/AIDS experience. Participants also worked on counseling and communication skills.

Following her training Dr. Skripka gathered her staff and conducted a mini-training. “I just shared my feelings and thoughts about the importance of a proper voluntary counseling and testing process and explained the main ideas.” As a part of the first prenatal visit, doctors at her hospital now conduct pre-test counseling on HIV. After this counseling, the patient is asked whether she wishes to be tested for HIV.

“Some women are just not ready to do this on the spot. They need to take their time to think, but almost all come back and take the test to ensure their future child’s health,” said Dr. Skripka.