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KAZAKHSTAN

CASE STUDY

Doctors Jointly Fight Dual Infection

USAID helps Kazakhstan develop new approaches to treating dual HIV/TB infection



Medical specialist of TB and AIDS facilities receive joint training. Photo: PSI

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Dr. Gulbaram Utepkaliyeva, Deputy Chief Doctor of the Almaty City TB Center.

CHALLENGE Like in many other countries, tuberculosis (TB) is the leading cause of death among Kazakhstani HIV patients, accounting for as much as 40% of deaths among HIV patients. However, until recently, the two infectious have been addressed by two different medical systems in the country – one focused on TB, and the other – on HIV/AIDS. Each of these systems maintains separate, independent patient database and uses different protocols with minimal interaction or collaboration with other disease-specific systems. This presents a major obstacle for HIV-positive patients in need of TB diagnosis and treatment, and vice versa. Prisoners -- who are one of the high risk groups both for HIV and TB infections -- participate in yet another vertical system of care within the prisons that is not connected to civil health-care systems. As a result, newly released prisoners who are suffering from HIV and/or TB tend to fall off the radar and pose a threat of spreading the infection into the broader community.

INITIATIVE In early 2008, USAID partnered with several health facilities in the former Kazakhstani capital Almaty to develop effective programs to address dual HIV/TB infection, including channels for counseling, testing, and life-saving treatment. The city's AIDS Center of became one of the key facilities to participate in the effort. The center's 106 staff - 36 of whom are physicians – provide Almaty's 2,500 registered HIV patients, of whom 31 have clinical AIDS, a wide array of services, including laboratory diagnostics, psychological support, obstetrics, dermatology, pediatrics, and dental care.

With USAID's support, the Center worked with the city's TB Center to develop new procedures and protocols for identifying and treating patients with dual infection. More than 70 specialists have been trained in the dual infection, and the two facilities have also started holding coordination meetings to share information and plan further cooperation.

RESULTS The Almaty City AIDS Center, along with five other pilot facilities, has demonstrated impressive results. More than 2,000 patients have accessed TB and HIV medical services by early 2009, and testing for TB/HIV co-infection is now standard procedure at both TB and HIV facilities throughout the city. Dr. Gulbaram Utepkaliyeva, Deputy Chief Doctor of the Almaty City TB Center, said that, as a result of the pilot project, interaction between HIV and TB services has improved significantly: “Now we have the opportunity to check the number of patients with dual infection and discuss monitoring and evaluation issues to improve patient management.” Dr. Gulzhakhan Akhmetova of the Almaty City AIDS Center said that TB diagnostics among HIV patients has improved and all services in the TB Center -- such as preventive treatments -- are more accessible to HIV patients.