

Strengthening the Armenian Health System with Diaspora

On July 3, 2019, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia (RA), in collaboration with the Turpanjian School of Public Health (SPH) of the American University of Armenia (AUA) and the Armenian Medical International Committee (AMIC), organized a panel discussion on the role of the diaspora in strengthening the Armenian health system. This was a pre-conference satellite event of the 5th International Medical Congress of Armenia.



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In his opening remarks RA's Chief Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs Zareh Sinanyan welcomed the participants and emphasized the importance of diaspora-homeland collaboration "to invent, create, innovate, and solve problems together through collective brainpower and networks."

Dr. Shant Shekherdimian, assistant professor of surgery at the University of California, Los Angeles, made a thought-provoking presentation on "Healthcare in Armenia: Role of the Diaspora, Then and Now" and suggested questions for discussion including "what can Armenia (the Ministry of Health and the Office of Diaspora Affairs) do to improve the effectiveness of diaspora contributions?"

The panel also included the Minister of Health Dr. Arsen Torosyan and the President of AMIC Dr. Vicken Sepilian. Minister Torosyan presented the current state of the Armenian health system and priority areas for long-term strategic development that can lead to sustainable advancement of the system. President Sepilian emphasized that "diaspora efforts can be streamlined to meet the needs and priorities that are put forth by the Ministry of Health" and highlighted the important role of the office of the Chief Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs in coordination of those efforts. The panel then fielded questions and suggestions from the audience which included both diaspora and local health professionals. One of the tangible results of the event was the agreement between the Ministry of Health and the office of the Chief Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs to collaborate in developing an online platform for diaspora consolidation that calls attention to the Ministry of Health's current and future priorities. This platform would help to coordinate homeland-Diaspora efforts and ensure the sustainability of outcomes.



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Institutionalization of Patient-Centered Tuberculosis Treatment in Armenia

SPH NEWSLETTER
Summer - Fall 2019



During spring and summer 2019, the Avedisian Onanian Center for Health Services Research and Development (CHSR) of the Turpanjian School of Public Health (SPH), American University of Armenia (AUA), held a series of two-day trainings for Tuberculosis (TB) physicians and nurses. The sessions were conducted within the scope of the "Institutionalization of Patient-Centered Tuberculosis Treatment in Armenia" project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by AUA SPH, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia (RA) and the National

TB Control Center (NTCC). The trainings aimed to equip the TB healthcare professionals working in inpatient and outpatient facilities with the necessary tools and comprehensive resources, as well as to implement people-centered TB treatment in Armenia. The participants had the opportunity to get updates on the TB epidemic globally and in Armenia. They were informed of recent developments in TB, transmission, diagnosis, and treatment of the disease, as well as its social-psychological and behavioral risk factors. The trainings were designed to improve general patient counselling skills among TB healthcare providers, with a strong emphasis on motivational interviewing techniques.

In addition, the trainers introduced the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendations on people-centered TB treatment approaches and their implementation in Armenia.

The research team employed different teaching methods and techniques, including interactive presentations, role plays, videos and discussions to make the sessions engaging and effective. The participants received full training packages containing educational materials, manuals, and various assessment tools.



Overall, 98 TB physicians and 134 TB nurses throughout Armenia participated in the trainings. The RA Ministry of Health accredited the two-day training curriculum and designated 11 continuing professional development credits.

On June 28, the CHSR held a one-day training for civil society organizations (CSO) to raise awareness and build capacity on TB advocacy. Overall 25 representatives of local and international community-based and patient-based NGOs, as well as relevant professional associations participated in the TB advocacy and information communication capacity development training to raise TB awareness and reduce TB-related stigma.

The training aimed to enrich the participants' knowledge and understanding of TB and its risk factors, as well as to develop



their skills for effective health communication. In the first part of the training, the participants gained information and knowledge on TB, its transmission, diagnosis, and treatment. The second part of the training focused on designing effective health communication strategies. SPH researchers were responsible for the training and made interactive presentations and also organized small workshops. Houry Mayissian, an invited communications expert, who has developed the public awareness raising campaign strategy for one of the components of the Institutionalization of Patient-Centered Tuberculosis Treatment in Armenia project joined the trainers and spoke to the participants about several health communication strategies.

The analysis of data from the pre- and post- training surveys showed that the training increased the participants' TB related knowledge

by 22%, and decreased stigma by 16%. Many participants mentioned that the knowledge and skills they had gained during the training, were very useful and relevant to their practice.



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AUA SPH Hosts Operational Research Capacity Building Symposium

SPH NEWSLETTER
Summer - Fall 2019

July: The Structured Operational Research and Training Initiative (SORT IT) of the World Health Organization Special Program for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (WHO/TDR), in collaboration with the AUA Turpanjian School of Public Health (SPH), organized a Satellite Symposium at the 5th International Medical Congress of Armenia. The symposium aimed to enhance operational research capacity in Armenia and the region making countries "data-rich, information-rich and action-rich" and improving public health. During the event there was a poster presentation session

by Armenian and Ukrainian National SORT IT course alumni and AUA Master of Public Health (MPH) program graduates. The participants had an opportunity to examine the posters, talk to the researchers, and vote for the best poster. Sose Margaryan, MD, Armenian SORT IT alumna 2018, received the best poster award. The title of her SORT IT study was "When will the coughing stop? Characteristics of children with pertussis (whooping cough) in Armenia (2014-2018)." The prize for the best poster award was the book "Gordis Epidemiology" by David D. Celentano and Moyses Szklo from the

Department of Epidemiology at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. The cover of the book includes AUA President Emeritus Haroutune Armenian's painting.



Neonatal Nurses and Midwives Trained in Essential Care for Newborns

September: The Avedisian Onanian Center for Health Services Research and Development (CHSR) of the AUA SPH, held a two-day training for nurses practicing in neonatal units of different maternity hospitals in Yerevan, Armenia. The training was led by Talin Gulgulian, MSN, clinical instructor from Hariri School of Nursing of the American University of Beirut. The training aimed to inform direct care nurses and midwives about acute situations in which neonatal resuscitation and respiratory support might be needed, and to teach the participating nurses how to manage those important clinical processes.

During the training, the participants were updated on the neonatal delivery room resuscitation and demonstrated ability in providing support to newborns using different models, such as bag mask ventilation, positive pressure ventilation machines, and others. In addition, the training focused on fundamental principles of newborn nutrition and the importance of breastfeeding. Overall 20 nurses from six health care facilities participated in the training. The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia accredited both the theoretical and practical components of the two-day training curriculum and granted nine continuing

professional development credits. Many participants mentioned that the knowledge and skills they had gained during the training were very useful and relevant and helped them to update their practical skill set.



Meghrigian Institute Celebrates World Sight Day 2019

October: Celebrating World Sight Day (WSD) 2019, the Garo Meghrigian Institute for Preventive Ophthalmology of the AUA SPH launched an eye screening program for socially disadvantaged children and children with motor or mental disorders. The program aimed to decrease visual impairment among the target population through provision of comprehensive ophthalmic examination and distribution of spectacles and medication to those in need. The staff of the Meghrigian Institute visited the Gavar Children's Home in Gegharkunik province of

Armenia, Special School N17 for children with motor disorders and Special School N11 for children with mental health issues in Yerevan. Fifty-four out of 55 children in the Gavar Children's Home, 39 out of 60 children in N17 special school and 61 out of 80 children in N11 special school were able to participate in detailed eye screenings. Overall, 154 children from the target population and 26 family members of those children were screened. Twenty-five children diagnosed with refractive errors such as nearsightedness, farsightedness, and astigmatism will receive

spectacles from the Meghrigian Institute in November. Children who had eye conditions that needed hospital care were referred to specialized centers for more advanced care.





Dr. Myron Allukian

September: The SPH organized a public health seminar titled “21st Century Public Health Challenges: Your Role and Responsibility.” The seminar was led by Dr. Myron Allukian Jr., past president of the American Public Health Association. The public health seminar reviewed the current public health challenges and the role of the social determinants of health in changing societies. He discussed the impact that health care systems, new technologies, the Internet, social media and big business have on a population’s health. He emphasized what public health professionals must do to have viable policies and programs to help communities and vulnerable populations achieve better health outcomes.

Dr. Tom Catena,
Dr. Armine Barkhudaryan

October: Travelling Doctors organization, Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, ProfMind development lab and the AUA SPH organized an event about volunteering for medical missions in the world. The distinguished speakers of the event were Dr. Tom Catena, Aurora Humanitarian Initiative Chair and 2017 Aurora Prize Laureate, founder, director and the only surgeon at the Mother of Mercy Hospital in Sudan’s war-ravaged Nuba mountains for the last 10 years, and Dr. Armine Barkhudaryan, obstetrician-gynecologist, the founder of TDA NGO, a goodwill ambassador of Aurora forum, a humanitarian who volunteered for medical missions in Sudan, Kenya, and Syria. While sharing their inspiring life stories of working in medical missions throughout the world, Drs. Catena and Barkhudaryan presented a few interesting and rare cases from their medical practices.



Judy Norsigian

November: The SPH organized a public health seminar titled “Global Commercial Surrogacy, Gene Editing, and Egg Provision by Younger Women.” The seminar was led by Judy Norsigian, a founding member of Our Bodies Ourselves in 1971, its executive director 2001-2015, currently chair of its board. During the seminar Norsigian emphasized that global commercial surrogacy has expanded rapidly, often without consideration of the health and well-being of the most vulnerable parties of these arrangements, including gestational mothers and offspring. She talked about the importance of advancing best practices and human rights in commercial surrogacy and egg-retrieval-for-pay, with a cautionary note about gene editing for human germline modification.

Winners of Best Poster Award
and Dr. Tsovinar Harutyunyan

November: The second-year Master of Public Health MPH students delivered poster presentations describing their internship experiences in various public health organizations. Internship sites have included the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia (RA); Fund for Armenian Relief; National Electronic Healthcare Operator (ԱՐՄԵԴ); Garo Meghriyan Institute for Preventive Ophthalmology and Avedisian Onanian Center for Health Services Research and Development (CHSR) of SPH; Jinishian Memorial Foundation; National Institute of Health named after Academician S. Avdalybekyan; Hematology Center after Professor R. Yeolyan; Nork-Marash Medical Center; Coimbatore Cancer Foundation (CCF), India; and National Institute of Research in Tuberculosis (NIRT), India.

Dr. Vahe Khachadourian,
Dr. Haroutune Armenian

December: How the Spitak post-earthquake research project became a reality, without doubt, has involved creativity, generosity, and persistence well beyond the required research expertise and specialized acumen in the field. The project initiator, Dr. Haroutune Armenian, AUA President Emeritus, Professor in Residence in the Department of Epidemiology at UCLA, also a watercolor artist, has, through persistent determination, generosity and creativity, channeled new funding for the next phase of the Spitak post-earthquake research he had pioneered in 1990. Thirty-two of his paintings, exhibited at the UCLA Kerckhoff Art Gallery in 2012, were sold then creating an \$11,000 fund for research at AUA. The total amount was recently granted to Dr. Vahe Khachadourian (MPH ‘11), Assistant Professor at AUA and recipient of the UCLA Outstanding graduating student award. The grant will support the next phase of the investigation.

MPH Alumni & Student Successes



Anna Isahakyan (MPH ‘20) has been awarded the first place in the field of health sciences among graduate-level health professionals in 2019 at the annual “Best Student” nationwide competition. Besides being one of the top performing students in her cohort, she has impressive volunteering, internship, and work experiences.



Anna Isahakyan (MPH ‘20) & **Tatev Arakelyan** (MPH ‘20) in collaboration with **P. Sargsyan** (Business), **S. Isakhanyan** (IT), **L. Gevorgyan** & **A. Avetisyan** (Designers) are developing a nutritional application called eatUP within the EPIC Incubator Program framework at AUA. eatUP would help people manage their dietary lifestyles and diet restrictions to improve their dining experience.