



PRIME Gears up Regional Operations

“Emerging” describes more than the countries in the former Soviet Union for PRIME staff dedicated to our new Europe and Eurasia region. The PRIME II Project itself is emerging as a player in this area of vast promise and reproductive health care challenges.

In Armenia and Uzbekistan, the countries where PRIME is currently involved, the health care sector is experiencing a slow transition toward primary health care and more market-oriented systems. Although much of the structure of the fully-subsidized Soviet system remains, funding has been reduced drastically and payrolls are frequently unmet. Formally or informally, providers are charging fees for their services in order to feed their families, consequently limiting access to needed health care.

As a result, PRIME faces a mixture of challenges and opportunities.

- The structure of hospital-based, highly medicalized health care is slowly being replaced with more responsive and effective family medicine. PRIME is assisting this new cadre of general practitioners with reproductive health training, job aids, and informative materials for their clients.
- Options for women who want to avoid or postpone pregnancy are often limited and abortion rates are high. By teaching counseling skills to providers and encouraging them to counsel women in family planning as part of emergency postabortion care, PRIME is working to create more contraceptive choices.
- Outdated and contradictory reproductive health guidance needs updating now that the health care systems in the region have access to WHO standards and other evidence-based information. With our extensive experience in this area, PRIME will be a great resource in helping to develop new policies, standards and guidelines, and link them with in-service training for practitioners at all levels.

Armenia: Work Underway with Ministry of Health

USAID/Armenia has asked PRIME to assist senior Ministry of Health (MOH) staff in laying the groundwork for updating reproductive health (RH) care policies and standards. Over the next year and a half, PRIME will facilitate a MOH working group charged with developing a full set of RH policies based on enabling draft legislation recently presented to Armenia’s parliament for passage.

To complement this policy development and the Armenia Social Transition Program initiative that is introducing family medicine, PRIME staff will develop training and learning modules to help family medicine

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doctors learn new reproductive health skills. Beginning in November, PRIME will also train 60 nurses and midwives working in primary care settings in rural Lori province through a six-month program blending traditional classroom experiences with on-the-job and distance learning approaches. A curriculum development working group met in Yerevan in July to design the training program. (See the PRIME Page *Training for Rural Nurses and Midwives Designed to Improve Maternal and Newborn Health Care*, available from richter@intrah.org)

Armenia: Country Office Grows

While the Armenia country office in Yerevan has been operational since September 2001, several new staff members have joined the project, helping to expand PRIME II's capacity.

Intrah Executive Director Bill Jansen named **Rebecca Kohler**, MPH, as the Armenia Country Director. Kohler, who brings over a decade of experience in international reproductive health and child survival projects, arrived in Yerevan with her family this March. She was most recently PRIME's Area Program Manager for West, Central and North Africa.

Sona Oksuzyan, Clinical Advisor, joined PRIME II in June. Oksuzyan is an obstetrician/gynecologist with strong programmatic skills. **Gohar Karapetyan** has recently been hired as administrative assistant.



Rebecca Kohler with Michael Grigoryan, Finance Director for the Armenia office.