



SUCCESS STORY

Maternity Hospital Improves Treatment for Mothers Living with HIV

USAID tears down barriers for HIV-positive mothers.



JSI/Alexander Golubov

Mothers discuss baby care in Symferopol.

“I don’t feel any different from the other women here,” said Natalia G., an HIV-positive woman and new mother. “I eat together with the other women, and we talk about how we will care for our babies.”

Two new mothers sit together, chatting at Maternity Hospital Number Two in Symferopol, Crimea. An observer would never notice the difference between them, but one of them is HIV-positive. “My relatives can also come here any time and spend as much time as they want,” says Natalia G.

Thanks to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Natalia does not experience the stigma and discrimination that often comes with HIV. She is just a happy mother with a healthy daughter. But had she delivered her daughter a year earlier, things might have been quite different.

When USAID-sponsored experts arrived at Maternity Hospital Number Two, where HIV-positive women from the Crimea deliver, they found that the hospital was discriminating against those patients. Women living with HIV were isolated in basement delivery and operation rooms, where guests were not allowed. Their infants were taken away and fed by poorly trained staff. The most visible evidence of the stigma was a thick brick wall that separated the HIV-positive women from everyone else.

In less than a year, these conditions changed because of a USAID project funded by the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR/Emergency Plan). It helped establish HIV prevention and treatment services. It also improved care for HIV-positive expecting and new mothers and gave them equal access to the hospital’s services. Trainings were held on preventing mother-to-child HIV transmission, and workshops were organized for health care providers who worked with HIV-positive patients. And the patients learned about cesarean sections, treatments, postpartum support and counseling, and referral in emergencies. The trainers and various workers in the HIV/AIDS field “changed Maternity Hospital Number Two medical staff’s attitudes to HIV-positive women,” said Dr. Illya Glazkov, the hospital’s chief physician.

Today, all deliveries for HIV-positive women are done via cesarean in comfortable, private delivery rooms at the maternity hospital, and relatives are encouraged to visit and help feed the babies. The wall separating HIV-positive women from the rest of the hospital has come down, both literally and figuratively.