

Saving The Lives Of Women In Serbia

Challenge

In Serbia, breast cancer is the number one cause of death among women. Cervical cancer is the number two cause of death in Serb women, while it is ranked seventh in the United States and even lower in some European countries. There is an attitude among women in Serbia that a diagnosis of breast or cervical cancer is a death sentence. It is critical to convince women in Serbia that early detection and treatment can save lives.



Photo: IRD Serbia

Uzice doctors view new colposcope donated by USAID.

Results

USAID provided medical equipment and supplies to the three main medical centers of Uzice, Sabac and Valjevo. In six weeks, the project provided information outreach and medical screening to women in all thirteen Western Serbia municipalities participating in the program. From December 2002 - February 2003, approximately 3,500 women were tested for breast and cervical cancer. The doctors, volunteering their evenings and weekends, examined up to 125 women per day.

The total project cost was \$43,720 - USAID contributed \$34,967. Cervical and breast cancer screening are now provided at a designated time every day at the same premises in the hospital - making screening, counseling, and treatment more efficient, accessible, and patient-friendly.

Initiative

Ms. Ljiljana Maksimovic, a psychologist from the Valjevo municipality hospital, was compelled to initiate the "Save a Life" program due to lack of medical information and facilities in Serbia's remote areas coupled with womens' fear of cancer screening. The program theme - "Your life has great value, first of all, to yourself and to your children, family, and friends" - demonstrates that information and awareness together can motivate women to seek screening and treatment.

"Save a Life" was created by a team of thirty-five doctors, counselors, and citizens working together through a USAID program in Western Serbia. Ms. Maksimovic engaged the support of women and media to collaborate on an education program, develop information materials, and distribute and collect questionnaires to inform women, as well as encourage their participation in a coordinated cancer screening program.

We gained much with the project - new knowledge, new equipment and most of all, the desire to organize ourselves in a better way to serve the women who were reached and made aware of the importance of screening."

- Dr. Zoran Jokic,