



U.S. Agency for International Development

Bureau for Global Health

# SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

## In Ukraine, Helping HIV-Positive Women Give Birth to Healthy Infants

IRINA DMITRIEVA WAS INTRODUCED to the shadowy world of drug use at age 12, when a group of older teens in her hometown of Odessa, Ukraine, asked to use her kitchen to process opium. They gave her free doses of the drug, and within two years she was an addict. She struggled to break free of her affliction well into adulthood, but never imagined she would be diagnosed HIV-positive, putting the health of her unborn child in jeopardy.

In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, currently home to the world's fastest rising infection rates, pervasive injecting drug use—and the sharing of needles that comes with it—have been the major contributors to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Of these countries, Ukraine has the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence, at about 1 percent of the adult population, and the growing number of Ukrainian children born to HIV-positive mothers has become a major concern. The problem is particularly grave in Odessa, where, in 2001, 7 percent of births at Odessa Oblast Hospital were to HIV-positive mothers. In 2003, the rate is expected to exceed 10 percent.

A pregnant Dmitrieva was referred to the hospital three years ago. She knew she was HIV-positive and feared that her baby would contract the virus as well. After seeking help from several physicians who advised against having the baby, she met with obstetrician/gynecologist Svetlana Posokhova, just three weeks before her delivery date. Dr. Posokhova provided Dmitrieva with addiction and HIV/AIDS counseling, and, just as critically, doses of the drug Nevirapine for both mother and child before and after birth.

Dr. Posokhova's hospital is able to help women like Dmitrieva through a regional project to reduce mother-to-child transmission of HIV. The project receives support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and is managed by the American International Health Alliance. The initiative integrates prevention of HIV transmission from mother to child into family-focused primary care, establishes treatment protocols for HIV-positive pregnant women, and develops training materials and curricula for health care professionals in counseling, obstetrics, and neonatology.

By identifying at-risk women and providing them with quality prenatal care and post-birth case management, the project has posted significant results. At the end of 2002, Odessa Oblast Hospital reported a preliminary decrease of 75 percent in HIV-positive babies born to HIV-positive mothers over the past three years. In 2002, all of the hospital's HIV-positive pregnant women received antiretroviral drug therapy to prevent transmission of HIV to their babies. In 1999, just 2 percent of the same group received drug treatment.

Dmitrieva's experience shows that HIV need not be passed on to future generations. After having her baby and experiencing the care of Dr. Posokhova, Dmitrieva changed her outlook and had the impetus to free herself of addiction. Her daughter, Sophia, is now a happy, HIV-free three-year-old, thanks in no small part to the compassion and skill of Dr. Posokhova. "She is like a second mother to me," says Dmitrieva of her physician. "She made me see that even though my HIV cannot be cured, I can live a good life."

*"Any time we successfully prevent an infant from developing HIV, we are thrilled that we were able to help."  
— Dr. Svetlana Posokhova*



Photo courtesy of Suzanne E. Grimman/  
American International Health Alliance

**Dr. Svetlana Posokhova helps infants arrive HIV-free.**

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20523-3600

[www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)

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