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SUCCESS STORY

Pediatric ER Becomes a National Model

The first modern pediatric ER in the region opens in Georgia



Photo: AIHA

The new state-of-the-art pediatric emergency room at Iashvili Children's Central Hospital in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Acknowledging the effectiveness of the pediatric Emergency Room, Georgia's Ministry of Health, Labor, and Social Affairs has decided to help finance its operations and is planning to replicate its model throughout the country.

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The name of a three-year old girl playing in the waiting room of the Emergency Pediatric Center (EPC) in Tbilisi, Georgia, is on the list on the triage board. It is written in green, meaning that the young child's condition is stable and that she can wait until the needs of the patients whose names are written in red and blue are addressed. Although triage is a normal part of urgent care in most developed countries, the technique was never used in the former Soviet Union and is still new to many emergency hospitals in the newly independent countries.

It is not surprising that the EPC was the first to implement this system — the Center itself is the only facility of its kind in Eastern Europe. The brand-new facility at Iashvili Children's Central Hospital in Tbilisi is bright, cheerful, and modern. In the year since it first opened, the number of patients each month has tripled. It is easy to see why. First, the center provides services free of charge. Second, it is open 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week and is equipped with hi-tech diagnostic and laboratory equipment. The facility also boasts a professional staff trained by USAID-funded specialists to perform clinical procedures on medical problems ranging from acute respiratory infection to abdominal pain, head trauma, febrile seizures, and infections of the nervous system. USAID's collaboration with the center has led to another important development: the position of emergency room physician as a medical specialty is now recognized in Georgia.

Through advanced emergency training and establishment of clinical practice guidelines, the EPC has decreased the average hospital stay from 13 to 7 days and increased the rate of discharges from 8 to 56 percent. As a result, the EPC reduced its operating costs by almost \$450,000 within one year. In addition, although the center treats the country's most difficult cases, hospital mortality rates have decreased from 6 percent in 1999 to 2.3 percent as of 2004. Acknowledging the EPC's effectiveness, Georgia's Ministry of Health, Labor, and Social Affairs decided to help finance its operation and replicate the model throughout the country. To facilitate this, USAID plans to support an emergency pediatric training center staffed by certified trainers to teach medical professionals throughout the country.