



## PARTNERS IN HEALTH: HEALTH INFORMATION SYSTEM



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When there is inadequate information available, it is difficult to determine if a country's health system is delivering effective care at acceptable levels of quality and cost.

That's one of the problems facing Ukraine right now. In the midst of changing from a communist to a market-based system, Ukraine is having to find ways to cut costs and improve effectiveness and quality of care - and quickly.

For example, the death rate from lung disease in Ukraine is high. Tobacco is one cause. Other causes are environmental, or tuberculosis-related. If reliable statistics were available, Ukrainian authorities could decide where to concentrate their efforts - on anti-smoking campaigns, environmental clean-up or TB control. The focus could be moved from treatment to prevention.

"Information systems for monitoring patients' health status and the population's health status were launched in the years of the Soviet Union and it was a very costly program," says Dr. Anatoly Mischenko, Director of Ukraine's Centre of Medical Statistics, Ministry of Health (Kyiv), who was in Canada recently. "They had to be abandoned. What is left in place is the examination of patients for certain diseases and those subjected to the radiation from the Chernobyl disaster."

Including Dr. Mischenko, a delegation of eight Ukrainian physicians involved in health information from six regions recently spent a

month (April 28 to May 28, 1996) in Canada examining the Canadian system from top to bottom. They included: Dr. Yuriy Mikhnenko, Director, Information and Analytical Centre of Medical and Ecological Issues for Health Care, Scientific and Research Centre "Engineering, Medicine and Ecology", Kyiv; Dr. Raisa Makarenko, Director, Donetsk Oblast Centre of Medical Information and Statistics; Dr. Antoliy Golunov, Head Physician, Kherson Oblast Medical Consulting and Diagnostic Centre; Dr. Ihor Tchaklosh, Assistant

Professor, Lviv Medical University, Chief of the Computer Centre, Lviv Regional Diagnostic Centre; Dr. Vasyl Dmyterko, Deputy Head Physician, Khmelnytsky Regional Centre of Medical Statistics; Dr. Jakov Bereznitsky, Senior Researcher, Dnipropetrovsk Scientific Research Institute of Gastroenterology (responsible for the hospital computer applications); Dr. Vitaliy Bobko, Deputy Head Physician, Ternopil Oblast Clinical Hospital (responsible for management and statistics).

"This visit is remarkable in that not many Canadian health professionals would have had the chance to look at the health information system in Canada so comprehensively," says Myroslav Kohut, who developed and led the study tour for the host agency, the Canadian Society for International Health, as part of its Partners in Health Canada-Ukraine linkage.

Kohut, an international health sector consultant from British Columbia, is of Ukrainian parentage but grew up in Canada. He has worked in the health care field for 20 years, speaks Ukrainian and has visited Ukraine 14 times on health care issues since 1992, including heading a

team contracted by the World Bank to assess the health sector and develop directions for reform.

He points out that all Ukraine's health care institutions have defined systems for reporting health statistics such as number of beds, physicians, nurses, cases handled, diagnostic categories and financial information. The quality of supply side information is reasonable, but information on the use of resources and costs is poor.

The databases are not set up for managing the health system and there is significantly less computerization in Ukraine than in Canada. Although Ukraine is computerized to some extent and some cities are connected to the Internet, there is a lack of software to develop standard data collection. Records are still kept on paper and most data is tallied manually. Ukraine's systems cannot compare with the sophistication of Canada's computerized health information systems.

Some regions are connected via telecommunication lines, but the Centre of Medical Statistics does not have computer links with the regions.

The delegation spent the first two weeks in British Columbia visiting hospitals, the B.C. Cancer Control Agency, the Vancouver and Simon Fraser Region Health Boards, the B.C. Ministry of Health, the University of Victoria's Health Information Sciences program and the Greater Victoria Hospital Society.

The visit gave the group an overview of a provincial health system in Canada and the methods used for data collection. The second week was spent in Alberta, looking at



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*Dr. Anatoliy Mischenko (l), Director of the Centre of Medical Statistics, Ministry of Health, and Chuck Shields, President of the Canadian Society for International Health.*