

# The Regional Knowledge Hub's Strategy to Build Human Resource Capacity for Rapid Scale-up of Ukraine's Ability to Provide Antiretroviral Therapy to PLWHA

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## INTRODUCTION

Ukraine—with an estimated adult HIV prevalence rate of 1.4%—is the country worst affected by the AIDS epidemic in Europe. In 2004, fewer than 5% of those who required antiretroviral therapy (ART) received it, prompting the Ukrainian Ministry of Health and the Ukrainian National AIDS Center to initiate a plan to roll out ART services across the country. The plan identified three factors integral to efforts to aggressively scale-up ART services in the country:

- training and professional development of healthcare workers;
- organization of an effective “care model” that would support patients and result in a high degree of therapy adherence among them; and
- increased availability of antiretroviral drugs, laboratory capacity, and other critical resources and supplies.

In its first phase, the plan focused on scaling up ART services in Kiev and five oblasts with the highest concentrations of HIV/AIDS patients. These services would then be extended nationwide through two subsequent expansions (see Figure 1).

The Regional Knowledge Hub for the Care and Treatment of HIV/AIDS in Eurasia is a unique network of individual experts and stakeholder organizations in HIV medicine that serves as a key capacity building mechanism in Ukraine's ART scale-up strategy. Established by WHO and the American International Health Alliance (AIHA) with funding from the German Society for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and other donors, the Knowledge Hub helps build the human and organizational capacity necessary to provide high-quality care to PLWHA in

Ukraine and the other nations of the former Soviet Union. Since January 2004, the Knowledge Hub has worked with the government and other stakeholders to formulate and implement Ukraine's national ART plan.

## GOALS

Key priorities of the Knowledge Hub are to develop standards for training care providers to initiate and manage ART and to create related curricula and training capacity that enable systematic capacity building in Ukraine and other countries in the region.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Knowledge Hub's programs in Ukraine are the result of collaboration among a number of national and international organizations dedicated to improving the care and treatment of PLWHA. Regional Knowledge Hub offices are located at the Kiev Medical Academy of Postgraduate Education (KMAPE). In addition, key Ukrainian strategic partners include the Ukrainian Ministry of Health, the Ukrainian National AIDS Center, Lavra AIDS Clinic at the Institute of Epidemiology and Infectious Diseases, Southern Ukraine AIDS Education Center (SUAEC), the All Ukrainian Network of PLWHA, and the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, which is the Global Fund's principal recipient for Ukraine and has been the primary source of funding for the training of Ukrainian care providers.

To date, the Regional Knowledge Hub has developed curricula for 20 different training courses. Materials are developed or adapted

from internationally recognized sources in accordance with WHO protocols and relevant national recommendations with support from USAID. These rigorous curricula are designed to build human and institutional capacity both to provide ART and other care to PLWHA and to create a core group of national experts who can train others. In this way, the Knowledge Hub creates a sustainable system of local expertise.

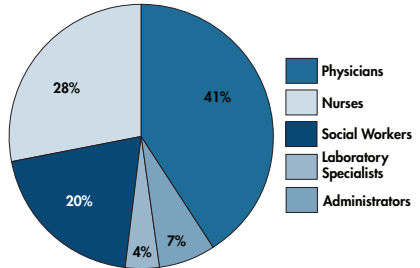


Figure 2: Ukrainian Knowledge Hub Trainees by Profession

trainings on key HIV/AIDS topics for 722 Ukrainian clinicians and allied health professionals (see Figure 2). Care teams trained by the Knowledge Hub are managing ART for more than 3,000 Ukrainian HIV/AIDS patients.

Key elements contributing to the Knowledge Hub's success include: cooperation among stakeholders; adopting a care team approach; proven training methodology; and continuous monitoring and evaluation of programs. While there are many ways to measure the effectiveness of a training regimen, trainees themselves are the most important evidence of the Knowledge Hub's success. Knowledge assessments attest to the quality of the courses. On average, participants increased their scores by at least 10 percentage points; for some courses the increase was closer to 30–40%. Recognition of participant progress through a national certification process for physicians in adult and pediatric HIV medicine in Ukraine has resulted in 57 physicians earning national certification as of March 2006.

## CONCLUSIONS

The ability to provide ART and other services for PLWHA depends on more than just the availability of medicines and other supplies. Capacity building of healthcare professionals and institutions is imperative. The Knowledge Hub has successfully rolled out a capacity-building program in Ukraine that supports the national government's plans for HIV/AIDS care and treatment and that strengthens the healthcare system by emphasizing a collaborative care team approach. This model can easily be adapted to other countries in the region.

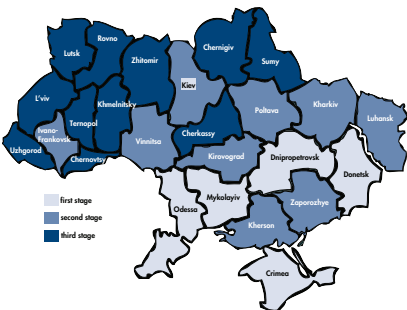


Figure 1: ART Scale-up in Ukraine

Oblasts targeted in the first, second, and third phases of a national plan for scaling up ART services in Ukraine.

## SELECTED OUTCOMES

As of March 1, 2006, the Knowledge Hub had conducted 29 skills-based