

WHO Special Project for Pharmaceuticals in Newly Independent States (NIS) – Strategic approaches

Nina Saoutenkova

Manager, Special Project on Pharmaceuticals in NIS, Health Technology and Pharmaceuticals
Email: NIS@euro.who.int

The Special Project on Pharmaceuticals in the Newly Independent States (NIS), which includes all former USSR countries except the Baltic countries, was established within the WHO European Office (Copenhagen, Denmark) in 1993 to meet the specific needs of countries in transition from the soviet to the market-oriented economy.

Initiatives taken since 1994

The first phase of the Special Project consisted of fact finding missions to make a proper assessment

of the situation. Based on these reports, key problem areas were highlighted and opportunities for successful change and assistance identified.

The second phase provided assistance to Caucasian and Central Asian Republics and at a later stage, to the Russian Federation in a number of key areas, namely:

- national drug policies
- legislation and regulation
- establishment of drug agencies
- quality control
- management of a market oriented supply system
- essential drugs concept
- rational drug use
- education.

Priorities per country differed, depending on the capacities of available counterparts.

The third phase –The Patient in Focus

In the third phase, starting in 1998, the work in countries changed in line with the conclusions of the strategy paper *The Patient in Focus*. Deteriorating health status, diminishing budgets and increased poverty levels asked for a larger emphasis on creating sustainable development in a number of areas as illustrated in Table 1.

The WHO Special Project for NIS offers a coherent and well targeted pharmaceuticals programme that is problem oriented, interactive and multidisciplinary, in addressing these huge challenges.

Table 1
The Patient In Focus-Priority Areas

- Access to essential drugs (increase affordability, decrease patient payments)
- Substantial improvements of drug management in hospitals,
- New methods of financing and reimbursement (especially for the poor)
- Evidence based drug selection and use
- Revision of medical and pharmacy education and training.

Major achievements

Within the first five years of its inception, The Special Project for Pharmaceuticals in NIS can boast of number of major achievements:

- The setting up of drug laws and regulatory agencies working in 11 NIS
- National drug policies adopted in 9 NIS
- Essential drugs available in the private sector,
- Improved public-private collaboration,
- Better qualified and skilled sector management capacity
- Improved information on essential drugs
- Tools for appropriate drug treatment
- Changes in drug financing methods initiated in 9 NIS.

A special NIS inter-country project component enabled all NIS to participate and benefit from WHO assistance and learn from experiences in the other countries. Networking, co-operation and problem solving capacity clearly improved.

The future

Over the past five years the Special Project has worked in line with the *Patient in Focus* strategy. This has resulted in successful capacity building in different priority areas in separate NIS as well on a Regional and NIS level.

From the first transitional period in which NIS have developed their own pharmaceutical sector systems and infrastructure, the reform process is now moving to an intensified collaboration and networking in several areas. Countries have now gained their own experiences and are becoming more interested and involved in regional collaboration, sharing experiences and information about

each-others achievements.

The Special Project approach can now be described as an equal partnership between WHO and NIS countries, where the capacity which has been built in each country is shared within the NIS.

Project on the Reform and development of pharmaceutical Education in Central Asian Republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

It is recognized that fundamental changes in the education system are necessary as a result of the shift in the pharmaceutical market from supply-oriented to needs-driven. This demands redefinition of healthcare professionals, their tasks and function in the future healthcare and drug supply system.

Since 1996, within the Special Project on Pharmaceuticals in NIS, there exists a Project on the Reform and Development of Pharmaceutical Education in Central Asian Republics (CAR). Changing of education has started within this project with the training and education of decision-makers and academics and the redefinition of curricula. Changes have been made in training curricula of physicians and pharmacists first of all in areas of drug selection and drug prescribing. Educators have been trained in problem-based pharmacotherapy teaching and have extended their experience to all educational institutions of the CAR region.

Close relationships among CAR countries and constant migration of population demands mutual recognition of diplomas at least within CAR Region. In spite of governmental agreements, the mutual recognition could not have been achieved without harmonization of curricula. This year, during the 7th

meeting of the Network on the Reform and Development of Pharmaceutical Education, all participants have agreed to adopt a credit system in line with European standards. It will allow countries to achieve mutual recognition as well as to integrate international educational systems. One of the major resolutions of this meeting is the setting up of an institute for the advancement and harmonisation of pharmaceutical education in CAR countries. The Special Project is currently seeking funding for the setting up of this institute. The milestones achieved by the Project on the Reform and Development of Pharmaceutical Education in Central Asian Republics, qualify as yet another major accomplishment for the Special Project on Pharmaceuticals in NIS.

Funding and collaboration

The project has been able to achieve the above mentioned goals through funding by major donations from the United Kingdom-Know How Fund (UK KHf) now DFID, by the United States International Development Agency (USAID), and the European Union (ECHO). Other contributors are the German Government and the Government of Norway. The Special Project works in close collaboration with the World Bank, UNICEF and TACIS projects.

The Special Project on Pharmaceuticals in NIS looks forward to meeting the challenges ahead and to achieving further significant goals. In order to keep up this intensive work, the Special Project is continuously seeking financial support from organisations willing to make donations. This is the main means by which the Special Project on Pharmaceuticals in NIS can continue to support pharmacy in these countries and in so doing, enrich the international pharmacy community.