

NGOs join forces to fight the twin epidemics of TB and HIV/AIDS

KYIV, Dec. 8, 2010 (UBO) – People the world over are aware that Ukraine has the highest level of HIV infection in all of Europe. Fewer know that the twin scourge of tuberculosis (TB) is the disease that kills more HIV positive persons than any other in Ukraine. In order to improve Ukraine’s ability to deal with both diseases, a group of established non-governmental organizations have joined forces to form the new All-Ukrainian Partnership Against TB and HIV, which will work to improve public and private responses to both diseases.

In a briefing on the topic: "Who is more interested in fighting the TB epidemic in Ukraine: government or the public?" leaders from the constituent members of the consortium discussed factors that currently severely hamper the effectiveness of government measures against tuberculosis.

Vitaliy Rudenko, head of the board of the Ukrainians Against TB Foundation said, “Since the foundation began its work in year 2,000, our strategic objective has been promotion of the fight against the tuberculosis epidemic in Ukraine. We have also worked to increase awareness of the increasingly critical situation as the TB epidemic expands at a much faster rate than the government’s efforts to deal with it. We believe that this new coalition will be able to accelerate our efforts against both of these rampant diseases.”

Background

Ukraine's TB epidemic is one of the most acute in Europe. Moreover, in recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of cases of multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB in the country. The situation with TB in Ukraine is complicated by the fact that the country also has a very high rate of growth of HIV / AIDS. International statistics show that over the past two decades the number of new cases of TB infection in countries with high HIV prevalence increased threefold.

The approach to the treatment of this complicated recurrent disease in Ukraine is characterized by inefficient organization of treatment, late diagnosis, and a lack of control to insure 100 percent adherence to the medication regime. As a result, many of the TB infected persons are unaware of their infection status. Even those who become aware of their status are unlikely to complete the necessary course of treatment.

Current unsatisfactory responses to TB are complicated by poor communications and information measures that might enhance motivation and increase adherence to treatment among people with already identified TB. There needs to be a much higher level of screening of people most at risk of contracting or spreading TB, i.e. drug users, prisoners, Roma, family members of patients, medical staff and staff in penitentiaries. Moreover, there is the lack of modern approaches to identifying and keeping patients in treatment. Further, public health providers have no experience in attracting patients from marginalized and vulnerable social populations that represent the largest pool of potential carriers of TB.

The important role of National NGOs

NGOs are unique institutions that have access to the marginalized and most vulnerable populations. NGOs focus on integrated and comprehensive solution of these problems.

They consolidate the efforts of NGOs working on TB and HIV / AIDS, create partnerships in free competition, and combine resources, knowledge and experience accumulated for years. They need to create sustainable and viable structures and systems in combating tuberculosis.

Advocacy, communication and social mobilization (ACSM) strategies should play an important role in this process. Currently, government together with civil society has developed a new draft National Program on Fighting TB, 2012-2017. This strategy has become a key tool for enhancing the effectiveness of measures for outreach services with TB.

Olena Davis, chair of the All-Ukrainian Coalition of HIV-service Organizations (Coalition), one of the organizing members of the new group said, "We believe the combined efforts of consortium members will increase our capacity to bring to bear efforts that have a greater impact on prevention and treatment of both of the diseases that devastate the lives of so many of Ukraine's young people. Among our leaders and members are people with decades of experience and dedication to this fight and a determination to improve the situation. Our consortium currently includes the representatives of the main national and international non-governmental organizations working with TB and HIV issues, Roma and patients' rights."

Recently the Global Fund to Fight for Malaria, HIV/AIDS and TB approved a grant of about \$100 million to overcome TB in Ukraine (Principal Recipient - Rinat Akhmetov's Foundation for Development of Ukraine). However, at this time the funds cannot become available until a grant agreement has been signed. Therefore, the All-Ukrainian Partnership Against TB and HIV believes the necessary funding should be expedited so it is available to put full force behind the national program against TB.

For more information on the issue of TB and HIV, link below:

http://www1.theglobalfund.org/documents/rounds/10/R10_InfoNote_TB-HIV_en.pdf

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