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TURKMENISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

New Method Aids TB Counseling

USAID helps TB specialists improve communication with patients, enhance treatment outcomes



Photo: Project HOPE \ Maya Nedirova

Doctor Sakhedov shares new counseling techniques with his colleagues in Mary Province.

USAID introduced a simple yet effective flip-chart method to enable TB specialists explain to their patients the complexities of their disease and its treatment.

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TB patients have to adhere to a long treatment course even after they're no longer experiencing TB symptoms in order to become completely cured. Effective counseling is essential in ensuring that patients understand their infection and get fully cured, so that the disease does not spread further or morph into more dangerous forms. Yet TB specialists often find it difficult to answer the broad range of questions about TB treatment and care. It is not always easy to explain the disease in a simple and effective way that will convince their patients to adhere to the treatment plan. To address this challenge, USAID helped to develop trainings and tools to assist TB specialists in communicating with patients who depend on them.

In November 2008, USAID organized a training of trainers in the capital city of Ashgabat for 20 doctors from around the country to introduce a simple yet highly effective method for counseling. The doctors learned how to use a flip-chart with illustrations and informational prompts to guide medical specialists through the counseling session, and to help the patients visualize and absorb the information provided. This tool had been developed and used successfully by USAID throughout Central Asia to improve the care that TB specialists provide to their patients. Now adapted for use in Turkmenistan, with illustrations by a local artist, the flip-chart has been published in the Turkmen and Russian languages, and distributed to TB specialists around the country.

One of the specialists trained in the flip-chart method was TB doctor Muhammed Sakhedov from Mary Province. "Our skills in counseling must constantly be improved and adapted in practice, because our patients' treatment outcomes are greatly affected by precisely these skills," said Dr. Sakhedov. "Since this training, I have had several cases where these new skills have been very helpful for me to persuade and effectively counsel patients."

Together with other participants, Dr. Sakhedov was also trained how to transfer his counseling knowledge to other medical professionals. Within a couple months of their training course, Dr. Sakhedov and his colleagues had trained 142 nurses from TB hospitals and primary health care facilities, so that more people across Turkmenistan can benefit from the assistance provided by USAID.