

up their self-confidence and show everyone that they are capable of doing something useful and good. It should be noted that these youngsters have undergone training on HIV/AIDS prevention organized by UNAIDS.

5. Results: Activities related to healthcare reform

Organizing a practical training program for all general practitioners in the region of Turgovishte

The support provided by MSF to the Malcho Malchev District provoked some reaction among local physicians who felt that the organization is favoring a few of their colleagues and a portion of the population.

To make up for this, the local office of the National Health Insurance Fund, the Regional Healthcare Center and the Regional Doctors' Association proposed that we organize a training program for all general practitioners in the region of Turgovishte.

The practical workshops were held in the different wards of the hospitals in Omurtag, Popovo, and Turgovishte, as well as in the local diagnostics and consultation centers.

49 general practitioners (30 from Turgovishte, 12 from Popovo, and 7 from Omurtag) who represent 75.85% of the family physicians in the region attended the practical training program.

Donating medicines to the specialized hospital for active treatment in Turgovishte

After a smooth start in the first three months of the year, in April 2000 the specialized hospital for active treatment in Turgovishte was once again confronted with a difficult economic crisis because it had to accept all the patients from the neighboring town of Popovo whose municipal hospital went bankrupt and was closed. In May 2000 the a very alarmed local government asked MSF to lend a helping hand by providing free medicines. In August 2000 the project was approved by the MSF administration in Geneva.

The list of medicines, which the hospital needed, was compiled together with the Deputy Director of the institution and the manager of the hospital pharmacy.

Establishing a primary healthcare unit in the town of Popovo

The municipal authorities of Popovo (population almost 35,000) applied to MSF for support in establishing a primary healthcare unit in the most impoverished district of the town, which has 2000 inhabitants. The average unemployment rate in Popovo is 38%, but reaches 80% in the Roma community. The economic situation of the town is even more difficult than that in Turgovishte.

Popovo has 62 physicians, 24 of whom will continue to work in the hospital, while 38 will sign contracts with the National Health Insurance Fund as specialists (15) or general practitioners (23). The specialists will establish individual practices but will have their offices in the former polyclinic, which is situated close to the hospital. Ten of the general practitioners will work in the villages surrounding Popovo, while 13 will be based in the town. Four of the physicians in Popovo have established a group practice, the rest will work individually.

The least developed and most impoverished district of the town is situated far away from the hospital and is inhabited by approximately 2,000 people, mainly Roma. Most of them cannot afford to buy the medicines they need, and the hospital is unable to provide such medicines for free.

The MSF team and the municipal authorities cooperated in renovating the building of the primary healthcare unit, which now serves 75% of the people in the neighborhood. Like in Turgovishte, MSF provides free medicines to the neediest patients.

Renovating the primary healthcare units in three villages in the Turgovishte region

In an effort to improve the terrible condition of the primary healthcare units in the villages of