

## Strengthening midwifery in the Republic of Moldova

By Malin Bring, 2005

**Her studies take five years to complete, and once she is finished she will barely earn enough money to pay the monthly rent, but Elena Lugu is full of confidence about the future. "I'm sure I'll manage somehow, and I'm really getting to like this profession" says the 18-year old midwifery student<sup>i</sup>.**

Elena Lugu is a third-year student at the Orhei Medical College, established in 1947 and until recently the only institution in the Republic of Moldova to train midwives. (In 2005 a second college of midwifery was set up in the capital of Chisinau.)

"I'm still a beginner, but I think it's a good college, and I learn new things every day," says Elena.

"At the start, I found studying a bit difficult, but now I've got used to it. I'm looking forward to my fourth and fifth year, when we will spend half the time practicing in different hospitals."

More hours of practical training was one of the elements that were introduced when the curriculum at the Orhei midwifery college was thoroughly revised and updated three years ago, as part of the WHO Making Pregnancy Safer initiative. Modernized educational materials, model-dummies and group discussions were other novelties that were introduced.

The Republic of Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Europe, and has been chosen as the pilot country for the WHO initiative in the European Region. Moldovan maternal and perinatal mortality rates are among the highest in the region, and women and children continue to suffer the negative consequences of transition from the Soviet times, which is why one of the main aims of the WHO campaign has been to strengthen midwifery in the country.



What matters is job satisfaction - 18-year old midwifery student Elena Lugu is confident about the future.



Studying to strengthen midwifery: a class of students at the Orhei Medical College

"For many years our maternities were closed entities, but now we teach our students to invite the woman's relatives to participate in the process of giving birth", says Lilia Catacu, methodology teacher at the Orhei Medical College.

"Before the curriculum was revised, sexuality and family planning were taboo subjects at the school, but now we talk openly about these things. The atmosphere between teachers and students has also changed. We used to be at totally different levels, but today we discuss things and learn from each other."

Another palpable effect of the initiative to strengthen Moldovan midwifery is the establishment of a national

midwives' association in 2003. Oxana Zavtoni, head of the maternity at the Mother and Child Health Care Research Institute of Chisinau, is president of the association.

“We have advanced a lot since our organization was founded and I think we’re on the right track, but a lot still remains to be done,” says Oxana Zavtoni.



Oxana Zavtoni, president of the Midwives' Association, has to work three different jobs to make ends meet.

“We are working to obtain written standards for every midwifery procedure, and to increase our professional degree in general. Midwives should learn English and basic computer skills in order to catch up with the latest developments in our field.”

One of the main problems is the extremely low salaries paid to midwives, forcing many to take on extra jobs, leave the profession or even the country.

“We have a difficult job to do and shouldn’t have to worry about what to eat tomorrow. It impedes our professionalism,” says Oxana Zavtoni, who herself works night shifts at the hospital, day shifts in a private clinic and in addition teaches at the midwifery college.

With two more years of studying ahead of her, midwifery student Elena Lugu is undisturbed about her future prospects, however.

“Being a midwife is a well respected job, and I’m sure the most important thing is that you like your job,” she concludes.

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