

AACA Enhances the Primary Health-Care Program at the Wellness Center and its Gavar Satellite Clinic near Lake Sevan



Dr. John Poochigian, a family medicine specialist from California, screens a patient at the Gavar Satellite Clinic.



The Wellness Center's Gavar Satellite, in the Lake Sevan Region, was completely renovated into a 10-room facility in 2003.

By James Faris

WASHINGTON, DC - In 2005, the Armenian American Cultural Association (AACA), the US sponsor of the Armenian American Wellness Center in Yerevan, continued its work in Armenia to introduce state-of-the-art primary health-care services at its main center in Yerevan and its satellite clinic in Gavar. Most recently, in August 2005, AACA organized a medical exchange from the U.S. to Armenia that included two family medicine doctors and a dermatologist from the U.S., who worked with Wellness Center staff to increase the Center's capacity to provide Western-standard family medicine services.

Participants of the medical exchange included Dr. Vicken Poochikian, a specialist in internal medicine with a private practice serving metropolitan Washington, DC, Dr. John Poochigian, a family medicine specialist from Kaiser Permanente in the San Francisco Bay Area, and Dr. Christine Avakoff, a dermatologist.

Drs. Vicken Poochikian and John Poochigian worked primarily at the Wellness Cen-

ter's Gavar Satellite Clinic, approximately sixty miles northeast of the capital city of Yerevan, as the main center in Yerevan was closed during the month of August for renovations. The doctors screened between thirty to forty patients a day while providing extensive training to the Wellness Center's family medicine physicians.

"The emotional and spiritual satisfaction I receive through this missionary work is invaluable to me, and I admire the staff of both AACA and the Wellness Center for their determination and devotion to continue to make a difference in the lives of so many people in Armenia," said Dr. Vicken Poochikian.

In addition to screening patients and providing advanced training to the Wellness Center's family medicine doctors, Drs. Vicken Poochikian and John Poochigian also spent time in patient education, emphasizing the importance of preventive medicine and healthy lifestyle choices.

Dr. Avakoff also worked primarily at the Gavar Satellite Clinic, providing much-needed dermatology services to approximately fifteen pa-

tients a day. "I was impressed with the efficiency, cleanliness, and professionalism of the clinic," stated Dr. Avakoff. "In fact, the clinic exceeded the standards of some clinics that I have worked in Silicon Valley in San Francisco with regards to service, patient education, and enthusiasm of the health-care workers, be they physicians or ancillary personnel."

While in Yerevan, the US medical doctors met with physicians at other clinics, giving a lecture on the cardiovascular complications of diabetes.

Four Armenian-American college students also participated in the medical exchange as interns, spending most of their time assisting the doctors at the Gavar Satellite Clinic by taking patient histories and helping to translate.

"Accompanying Dr. Vicken Poochikian during his final week at the clinic, I witnessed the craze created when American doctors visit an Armenian village," said Christine Megerdichian, a junior pre-med student at Harvard University. "There was hardly any standing room as patients began lining up to see the doctors early in the morning, but

the doctors managed to see every patient, even if they had already packed up for the day and were ready to go."

A large part of AACA's role in its sponsorship of the Wellness Center in Armenia is organizing training exchanges between the U.S. and Armenia to provide advanced training to Wellness Center medical staff in breast health, gynecology, pathology, and family medicine services. AACA has organized forty-three such medical exchanges since the Center's establishment in 1997.

The medical exchange was part of AACA's larger mission of introducing Western-style family-centered primary health-care services to Armenia that are affordable, sustainable, and accessible to everyone. The Wellness Center first began offering family medicine services at the Gavar Satellite Clinic in 2003, and then later introduced these services at the main center in Yerevan in early 2004.

AACA established these services at the Wellness Center, in addition to the quality breast and cervical cancer services that the Center has provided to the women of Arme-

nia since 1997.

Another facet of AACA's goal to provide accessible and affordable quality primary health-care services to all Armenians is the renovation and expansion of the building that currently houses the Wellness Center in Yerevan.

The renovation, which will be completed in October 2007, will result in a state-of-the-art six-story health-care facility providing high-quality diagnosis and treatment onsite to women, men and children. The building will be seismically reinforced against future earthquakes and will utilize clean and reliable energy sources.

AACA established the Wellness Center, originally named the Armenian American Mammography University Center, in April 1997 to battle the devastating impact that breast cancer was having on the women of Armenia. The Center has since grown into the most advanced and trusted women's healthcare facility in the Caucasus, and has expanded its services to include cervical cancer screening, infertility, diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, and basic primary health care, in addition to its mammography and breast ultrasound services. To facilitate the Center's work, AACA established a modern pathology laboratory onsite at the Wellness Center, which is widely considered the most capable and effective in Armenia.

For more information about AACA and its humanitarian project in Armenia, the Armenian American Wellness Center, visit them online at www.aacainc.org or contact them by e-mail at info@aacainc.org; to donate, make checks payable to AACA and mail to 1300 Crystal Drive, Suite 1504, Arlington, VA 22202.



The Gavar Satellite Clinic's nurse, Anoush, assists doctors to screen patients prior to their visit with the doctor.



Dr. Vicken Poochikian, an internal medicine specialist from the U.S., screens a patient while a Wellness Center doctor takes notes.