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Bob Aaron
Illinois Wesleyan University

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March 19, 1999

Contact: Bob Aaron, 309/556-3181

"Sisters of Mercy"
**Russian Nurses from Sister City Visit Bloomington-Normal
To Study U.S. Nursing Practices, Education**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—Eight Russian nurses from Bloomington's sister city Vladimir are studying U.S. nursing and medical practices here this month under a grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

The Russian nurses—who arrived March 1 and will depart March 27—are taking 45 hours of class work as part of a wide-ranging introduction to nursing in the U.S. with the goal of applying U.S. practices to post-Communist Russia. They also are visiting many area health-care facilities to get a first-hand glimpse into the U.S. health-care system.

Among those participating in what one Russian nurse called a "crash course" are Illinois Wesleyan University, Mennonite College of Nursing, St. Joseph Medical Center, and BroMenn Regional Medical Center.

Sitting in a semi-circle in a classroom in Stevenson Hall, home of IWU's School of Nursing, the Russian nurses had an animated discussion about their U.S. visit and their hopes for the nursing profession in Russia. All except one of them are on their first trip to the United States; one of the nurses is on her third visit. The conversation was conducted through a translator, Andrei N. Essaoulov, an instructor at Illinois State University's English Language Institute.

"One of the program's objectives," explained Tatiana Zaichikova, a nursing educator in Vladimir, "is to learn the principles of nursing education and the nursing process in the U.S.

"We see incredible progress in nursing in the U.S. in recent years," she added. "These days, nurses in the U.S. are professionals—they do what doctors do in Russia. We're pleased to see what nurses can achieve because their level of education is so significant."

Zaichikova compared the professional development of nurses in Russia today to where U.S. nurses were in the 1950s and 1960s, adding cautiously, "We hope our road will be shorter—we don't have the time."

Commenting on the program's scope and themes, another nurse said: "Everything we need to do our jobs in Russia is covered," adding that, "This has been a good crash course to improve our professional standards. We will try to implement what we've learned here."

The discussion with the Russian nurses turned increasingly lively when they were asked why they went into the profession. The enthusiastic responses included "to do good," "there's no greater job," and "to take care of people who can't take care of themselves."

The Russians pointed out that the term nurse in their native language translates as "sisters of mercy," an indication of how they view their profession—a profession they closely identify with the exploits of the English nurse Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War of the 1850s, which was fought in Russia.

"When we teach the history of nursing," one nurse explained, "she is the starting point."

However, others pointed with pride to a long list of pioneering Russian doctors and nurses who contributed to aiding the wounded on the Crimea's battlefields.

The Russian nurses are already thinking about how they will use the information and insights gained on their U.S. visit when they return to Vladimir.

"Each of us has our plans for that," Zaichikova said. "In nursing education, I want to expand the curriculum, for example, taking into account continuing education for nurses. Another thing to consider is starting a new program for family nursing."

One of Zaichikova's colleagues said her goal is to change the relationship among doctors, nurses, and hospitals in Russia.

"Doctors in Russia," she said, "see nurses as just taking orders from them. I think we should be viewed more as partners."

Another nurse is eyeing the notion of setting up a nursing association in

Vladimir, pointing out that, "What we want is more independence for nurses in our work."

A third possible outgrowth of their Bloomington-Normal experience might be an experiment with the organization of one or two hospital wards in a hospital. For example, creating a situation where nurses have more leeway in their professional work—particularly decisionmaking—and show what they have achieved to Vladimir's health-care leaders and the public.

Charla Renner, an associate professor of nursing emeritus who retired from IWU in 1997, is among community-nursing leaders, coordinating the Russians' visit.

Renner, who spent two-and-one-half weeks in Vladimir in October, 1997 studying Russian nursing practices, said of the visitors: "They are very interested in everything. It's amazing, they're taking volumes of notes. We couldn't ask for better 'students.'"

Renner's visit to Vladimir to study Russian nursing practices and traditions involved observations at a medical college and several hospitals. The trip was under the auspices of the Bloomington-Normal Sister City Association Medical Partnership Committee, directed by Jana Edge. Renner is planning a return visit to Russia in May and is likely to be accompanied by some of her IWU nursing colleagues.

She met three of the Russian nurses visiting Bloomington now on her 1997 trip to Vladimir.

While in Bloomington, the Russian nurses are touring health care facilities and are observing nursing techniques in various health-care and educational settings. They also will have the chance to participate in some individualized learning experiences in fields like critical care, surgery, obstetrics, and home care. Project goals include improving health care services delivered in Russia, as well as the training and retraining of nurses.

A purpose of the Bloomington visit, according to a briefing sheet, is to "establish guidelines and identify priority topics for the next phase of the

partnership program?the 'training for the professors of nursing at the medical college' [in Russia] by American nurse educators." They also are evaluating educational materials and media for appropriate use and adaptation for Vladimir.

The Russian nurses and their U.S. counterparts are exploring several cutting-edge issues affecting the profession, under an effort called, Partnership Program in Nursing Education and Practice. Among agenda topics are:

- Healthcare delivery systems,
- Educational preparation and career issues,
- Infection control practices,
- Patient teaching,
- Nursing process,
- Nursing ethics and legal concerns,
- Management functions and skills as well as leadership styles,
- Home care visits,
- And, several specialty areas, including critical care, mental health, and geriatrics.

Among the group of Russian nurses are two nurse educators, including one who also is a physician (in Russia almost all nursing is taught by physicians), a specialist in burns and orthopedics, and three who work in a hospital cardiac care unit.

The Russian nurses are Olga Starova, Larissa Andrianova, Natalia Poletaeva, Nadezhda Rasskazova, Tatiana Zaichikova, Antonia Gubina, and Lilia Lapteva. Nadejda Vokova is the group's translator. The Russian nurses are staying with several local residents?some of whom have adopted Russian children.

The nine-month, \$141,000 grant supporting the Russian nurses' visit is through AID's Sustaining Partnerships into the Next Century (SPAN) program, which is administered by the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX).

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Editor's Note: *To arrange an interview with the team of Russian nurses and/or to accompany them on their visits around Bloomington-Normal, contact IWU Office of Communications, 309/556-3181. These arrangements, in part, are contingent on the availability of translating services and permission of the medical settings on their agenda.*

