Over 2 thousand doctors – obstetricians-gynaecologists, neonatologists, nurses and residents – specialising in different areas from all over Lithuania seeking to improve their practical skills in providing first aid to pregnant women, women in labour and neonates, attended the training, the benefit whereof will be felt by every individual.

2,337 experts attended the training which was held on five topics in major cities of the country in 2015. The training had an objective to improve the professional qualification and skills of using modern technologies. Prof. Mindaugas Kliučinskas, the Manager of the "Improvement of Perinatal and Neonatal Health Care Services in Lithuania" project and the Head of the Maternity Unit of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Clinic at Kauno klinikos of the Hospital of the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (LSMU), said that in order to obtain the required knowledge one had to put much effort: the training was unique in the sense that it was not just about listening to the lectures or theoretical information; before attending the training each participant had to read the methodical recommendations provided electronically and pass a test with at least a 100 per...
cent score of correct answers. According to the professor, this is unprecedented in Lithuania that a state programme is delivered on the basis of such high standards.

Mr Eugenijus Tiškus, an obstetrician-gynaecologist and a Senior Officer of the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Service at Alytus Regional Stasys Kudirka Hospital, said that last year almost all employees of their hospital attended one course, some even attended two.

"The training was of an exceptionally high standard, modern, professional and delivered to generally acceptable standards. During the training not only did we learn about the resuscitation of neonates, but also about specialised emergency obstetric assistance, preparation of ill neonates for transportation and communication with the patients in critical situations. Everyone willing to participate went on the training and was later delighted to have had such an opportunity. Projects of a similar nature are very welcome," the doctor is convinced.

The experts who attended the training in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai and Panevėžys were divided into small groups to work with mannequins: some were working; others were assisting them, whereas the third ones were assessing the work. Every clinical situation was dealt in the mentioned manner. The topics of the training varied from "Conflict Management and Communication with Patients" to "Modern Specialised Obstetric Assistance". An exam was taken after the course.

Universal methodological recommendations both for practitioners and for ordinary people

According to professor M. Kliučinskas, another activity already completed as part of the project, which is of significant importance, is the development of 70 methodological recommendations for obstetric and gynaecological diagnosis and treatment.

"There is no other field of medicine in Lithuania which has such comprehensive methodological recommendations that are currently enjoyed by the obstetrics and neonatology. We have developed 40 obstetric and 30 neonatology diagnosis and treatment methodologies (they were published on the website of the Ministry of Health), which were approved by Vilnius and Kaunas universities. Everyone providing obstetric and neonatology services, regardless of the hospital, are bound by the said methodological recommendations. The audits will be performed on the basis of these methodologies. Moreover, people seeking to know how a specific service is to be provided and what they can expect are able to access the methodologies. This service which was harmonised country-wide is a perfect example of the benefit brought by the project," the project manager is convinced.
Assistance to Children with Congenital Heart Diseases

Although nearly 300 babies with heart defects, the most common of all congenital diseases, are born in Lithuania every year, little does the public know about congenital or acquired heart diseases. Cardiologists and cardiac surgeons of our country carry out notably complex surgeries. However, the issues pertaining to rehabilitation of children post-surgery and improvement of the quality of their lives remain a personal concern of their parents. The support of the NGO Fund under the Lithuanian – Swiss Cooperation Programme is used to improve the current situation.

Congenital heart defects are anatomical aberrations of the heart or the great vessels that impede blood circulation: they form before the birth or become apparent afterwards. There is a larger number of defects who raise a child with a congenital heart defect from practitioners parents are always struck by a shock. Waiting for a surgery, enormous fear, uncertainty and hope then follow. Most of parents who raise a child with a congenital heart defect undergo all of these stages,” said Ms Daiva Jonauskienė, the President of the CHA. “A heart defect that one has is sometimes accompanied by other health issues, complications and impedes normal development. Hence, in order for the child to be able to have a normal life, assistance is necessary.”

Between 2013 and 30 September 2014, the “Heart for Life” subproject funded under the Lithuanian – Swiss Cooperation Programme and aimed at a target group Lithuania-wide was implemented. In the course of the subproject, engagement with children who have heart defects continued for 18 months.

“We held five family camps and as many as 52 highly meaningful events together with Širdapūkis (Heartpuff), children’s friend and project assistant. 5 festivals were also held for the diseased children at the 2nd Heart Surgery Unit of Santariskių klinikos of Vilnius University Hospital,” told Ms D. Jonauskienė. “This gave many positive emotions and psychological support to both the seriously ill children and their care providers.”

To Santariskės from across entire Lithuania

Another issue faced is a lack of transport and leisure services to members of the CHA. Santariskių klinikos of Vilnius University Hospital is the only facility in Lithuania where heart surgeries and coronography are performed for children; hence they have to come to the Clinics from all over the country.

A car acquired using the subproject funds allowed to achieve the planned goals: for a year and a half complimentary transport services were provided to families with children suffering from serious heart diseases – to large or socially disadvantaged families or those which do not have their own car.

For the purpose of disseminating the information on the issues of children with serious heart and cardio-vascular diseases, the activities of the CHA and the course of the subproject were published on the Internet on a regular basis and advisory meetings were held with practicing cardiologists and rehabilitation physicians. As part of the subproject, 23 screenings of the CHA documentary film “Child’s Heart” were held in the towns across Lithuania. A number of brochures and fliers as well as a second book for parents called “Congenital Heart Defects in Children”, which promotes interest in children’s heart diseases and rehabilitation services at “Saulutė” and “Žibute” sanatoria, were published in Lithuanian. 7 information stands, which provide information on the CHA activities and the course of the subproject, were installed at different health institutions.

The initiative will continue

“The funds of the “Heart for Life” subproject helped the CHA as an organisation become stronger and more independent. More options became available for planning and implementing the goals. Furthermore, the first events of the World Heart Day were launched in Western Lithuania: they drew attention to children growing with heart diseases,” said the President of the CHA. “Assessing the benefit of the project, we can state that the project was indeed significant: the independency of the organisation has strengthened and awareness has increased. In the course of the subproject, we have cooperated with practitioners and Mr Vytenis Pavilas Andriukaitis, the European Commissioner, and became co-founders of the Lithuanian Patients Forum under the Ministry of Health.”

According to the head of the Association, the “Heart for Life” was the first project of such weight in Lithuania for both the CHA and the target group. “We will carry out rolling project activities in the future: we plan to continue taking part and holding events and camps, educating and sharing information. And we hope that people who face a serious heart disease of a child will receive psychological support that is very necessary as well as information and will contact the CHA more often,” summarised Ms D. Jonauskienė.

The total amount of the “Heart for Life” subproject makes up EUR 61,304. 76.5 per cent or EUR 46,898 of it was allocated from the Swiss financial support fund, 13.5 per cent or EUR 8,276 – co-financing from the State budget of the Republic of Lithuania and 10 per cent or EUR 6,130 – the CHA funds.
Country-Wide Training for Reducing Discrimination in the Society

People with mental health disorders or mental disabilities are often discriminated by the public: they face slim chances of employment, poor treatment conditions and neglect as well as suffer marginalisation from other people. Public Enterprise “Psichikos sveikatos perspektyvos” (Mental Health Perspectives) (formerly Public Enterprise “Globali iniciatyva psichiatrijoje” (Global Initiative on Psychiatry)) has been implementing a subproject for the recent 16 months in order to make a contribution to protecting the rights of people with mental or psychosocial disabilities and public education which will help the discriminated group gain much more understanding and tolerance.

“There is little debate on the mental health topic in the general public. Hence, the question was whether it was more related to negative stereotypes or mere ignorance. It became known that experts who had spent long time working in the field of mental health care or social services could tell very little about human rights of their clients and seemingly they did not even pause to think about this,” said Ms Ugnė Grigaitė, the manager of subproject No CH-5-FM-1/43 “Building Capacity at Public Enterprise “Globali iniciatyva psichiatrijoje” in Order to Achieve Systematic Change in Mental Health Field and to Share Experience with other NGOs”.

Following the information held by the Institute of Hygiene, there were 73 people with mental and behavioural disorders for every 1,000 inhabitants in Lithuania in 2014. For the purpose of disseminating specialised knowledge, the Knowledge and Training Centre was established, conference equipment acquired and training launched using the funds of the Lithuanian – Swiss Cooperation Programme. A total number of 95 representatives from the NGOs active in the mental health field and communities from across Alytus, Kaunas, Marijampolė, Tauragė, Telšiai, Utena and Vilnius districts attended the training held by Public Enterprise “Psichikos sveikatos perspektyvos” (PSP) in 2013. The topic on implementing project activities in the mentioned field drew particular attention.

Over its fifteen years of existence, the PSP completed over 60 projects of different extent and scope and now actively shares its experience and knowledge with colleagues and like-minded partners who work in various parts of Lithuania. “In Lithuania we are one of the few who have extensive experience in human rights and mental health as well as HIV, AIDS and mental health areas. We have in-depth knowledge of the re-offending assessment and the most efficient rehabilitation practice, we are knowledgeable of the development cooperation and the phenomena of ageing in the global context,” told Ms Karilė Levickaitė, the Director of the PSP.

Topics of the training were developed on the basis of extensive experience of the organisation which focuses on violations of human rights and gaps in the mental health system. It is expected that as a result of sharing specialised knowledge, discrimination against people with mental health disorders will reduce country-wide.

“We share our knowledge we have with our colleagues not only from NGOs, but also from the public sector. We registered on the Training Provider Database of the Civil Service Department and we are on a mission of promoting efficient, humane and ethical mental health care across Lithuania,” said Ms K. Levickaitė. “Such NGOs as Vilnius Family Psychology Centre, which is broadening the spectre of services to be provided after acquiring competencies in attracting additional supporters, also help.”

According to Ms U. Grigaitė, the manager of the subproject under implementation by the PSP, the Lithuanian – Swiss Cooperation Programme gave an excellent opportunity to systemise all experiences and expertise, share them with colleagues from NGOs and build the capacity of ours, as an NGO, in this manner. The funds from the support of the Fund for Non-Governmental Organisations under the Lithuanian-Swiss Cooperation Programme make up nearly EUR 50 thousand.

The PSP puts its efforts in having the institutional care service system reformed by replacing full-time care in large establishments with community services (over 6 thousand people with mental and intellectual disorders live in full-time care establishments). Public education campaigns are held in order to promote tolerance among the general public.
The present global warming is the most rapid in recent 10 thousand years.

Likewise historians assess written records, researchers of the Lithuanian peatlands and wetlands are able to assess peatlands. Peatlands are natural archives in some sense which contain the entire history of the Holocene geological period in their deposits, researches of which aim at gathering evidence on the change of natural conditions. How have the ecosystem and climate of the peatlands changed over the recent 10-11 thousand years? The Lithuanian and Swiss scientists try to find an answer to this question: in the recent decades the global warming has been unprecedentedly rapid.

The Nature Research Centre, along with its partners: Vilnius University and the Institute of Geological Sciences of the University of Bern, works on a project called “Climate Change in Peatlands: Holocene Record, Recent Trends and Related Impact on Biodiversity and Carbon Sequestered in Peat (CLIMPEAT)”, which aims to explore the course of the Holocene climate history and is funded under the Lithuanian – Swiss Cooperation Programme.

“Using the indicators found in peatlands, we can establish rather precisely what climate conditions were prevalent on the Earth over the recent 10-11 thousand years, i.e. over the Holocene geological period. Through the research to be carried out we seek to reconstruct the climate change in the territory of our country over the entire Holocene period. The results obtained will allow defining the prevailing climate changes ever so accurately,” said assoc. prof. Julius Taminskas, PhD, the Head of the Laboratory of Climate and Water Research at the Nature Research Centre.

The growth of trees in peatlands is dependent most on the fluctuations of ground-water levels: if the water level is high, the root system takes less oxygen and nutrients. As a result, the dynamics of forest vegetation and fossil tree stumps preserved in different peat layers mirror all historic changes of water levels which can help determine the climate prevalent during a certain period. According to the head of the research, if we carried out a research on older geological periods, we would find changes that compete with the current ones; however, the Holocene period draws most interest due to the noticeably changing climate, which warms up and then cools down again.

“There has never been such a strong and intensive global warming yet. Our research evidences a very rapid climate change which evolved just over a couple of decades. One more thing to note: the obtained data matches the records of the researches carried out in the Scandinavian countries or Great Britain. This implies that our readings are related to the global climate change,” said the Project Manager.

At present the role of peatlands is ever so relevant. Peatlands are a greenhouse gas sequestration ecosystem of some sort. “Plants take gas from the atmosphere. However, when they decompose, CO₂ comes back to the atmosphere. On the other hand, a proportion of peat does not decompose because it is covered with water and accumulates or “grows”; hence, the tied CO₂ also remains there. It should be noted that peatlands and wetlands are the systems that reduce CO₂ content in the atmosphere. Hence, if we did not mine or burn peat or use it in greenhouses, but left it in wetlands where it belonged, a large proportion of greenhouse gas emission would not reach the atmosphere,” warned Assoc. Prof. Dr. J. Taminskas.

The peatland research is carried out in four different locations across Lithuania so that it would be possible to compare the data obtained: at Rėkyva (Šiauliai District) and Aukštumala (Šilutė District) wetlands, Čepkeliai Marsh (Varėna District) and Kerėplis Lake wetlands (Trakai District). The research was carried out in the field study sites built as part of the project where wells with automatic water level and temperature meters and automatic dendrometers were made.

“The project will continue over the first three months of 2016. At present, a number of scientific articles have been prepared, a proportion of which has been published; a final report is under way. It is also planned to hold events presenting research to scientists and the public across Lithuania and Switzerland,” said Assoc. Prof. Dr. I. Taminskas, talking about the final works of the project.

It is expected that the CLIMPEAT project will help determine the links between the ecosystems of peatlands and climate changes, between the anthropogenic activities and emissions of preserved carbon and that the data obtained, which reveals links between the pedosphere, atmosphere and anthropogenic phenomena, will be the basis for seeking the protection of peatland resources and a sustainable use thereof.

The works under project “Climate Change in Peatlands: Holocene Record, Recent Trends and Related Impact on Biodiversity and Carbon Sequestered in Peat (CLIMPEAT)” were launched in January 2013 and should finish in March 2016. The amount of EUR 588,164 was allocated for the project, EUR 499,939 came from the Swiss financial support fund and EUR 88,225 was additionally provided as co-financing from the State budget of the Republic of Lithuania.

Jūratė Vlaščenkienė
Deputy Head
International Financial Assistance Coordination Division
Tel. +370 5 239 0293
E-mail: jurate.vlaschenkiene@finmin.lt
Sub-project "Building Capacity at Public Enterprise "Globali iniciatyva psichiatrijoje" in Order to Achieve Systematic Change in Mental Health Field and Share Experience with other NGOs".

Project "Improvement of Perinatal and Neonatal Health Care Services in Lithuania".

Sub-project "Heart for Life".

Sub-project "Climate Change in Peatlands: Holocene Record, Recent Trends and Related Impacts on Biodiversity and Sequestered Carbon (CLIMPEAT)". Programme: Research and Development.

Swiss contribution - for real and targeted works