

TECHNICAL PROGRESS REPORT  
for the period of 1 October 1998 to 30 April 1999

“Epidemiologic Studies of Radiation Induced Thyroid Disease in Belarus (BelAM Thyroid Project) and Ukraine (UkrAm Thyroid Project)”

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### 1. Bel Am Thyroid Project

The project underwent a traumatic experience which we all dreaded for the past year: the physical move from the old facilities at the Masherova street to three new locations all around Minsk. The screening and clinical laboratory work is now located in the new dispensary at the Makayenka str., still within the city but removed from the center, the railroad station (principal mode of travel from outlying areas), and though reachable by public transportation, it is not easily accessible. The epidemiology and DCC units are now at the old factory site on Dolgobrodskaya str. It is reasonably close to the metro station. The dosimetrists are outside Minsk city limits in Borovlane. To complicate matters, the communication network broke down so that no telephone, or fax connections were accessible to us for the past two months. We are communicating either through private phones or through the Ministry of Health. Hopefully this will be corrected soon.

We are not happy with this situation and will try to persuade them at least to move the epidemiologists and DCC staff to the dispensary location to allow for closer interaction of their work. Evidently space will be available to accommodate these units later in the year.

We continued pressuring Belarusians to expand their work to Gomel, setting a branch there to cover the Gomel Oblast residents rather than relying on mobile teams traveling from Minsk to search for cohort members. There seemed to be a reluctance on the administrative staff to take that step. Finally, when Dr. Ostapenko replaced Dr. Mrochek as the new director of the Clinical Research Institute of Radiation Medicine and Endocrinology, the situation changed practically overnight. Training of the mobile team cadres began immediately, some ultrasound units were located that could be used in Gomel and it appears that at least a “mobile unit center” will be operational in the near future. We will see at our next visit how it work and if it does. We will continue insisting on a solid plan with proper organization and resources to make this a success.

There were some organizational changes in the BelAm project. In addition to the

obvious change in the directorship of the Institute, Dr. Kenigsberg was reinserted into the organizational schema as the “administrator”. We do not quite understand the reason for it nor the “job description” and at this time are trying to find out. Dr. Polanskaya, on the other hand, who was at a level of the deputy directors has now been placed under the administrator. We feel that, as the individual in charge of quality control activities, she should be working at a higher administrative level than the other components, certainly not under an administrator. We have already questioned that and will continue to press our point. Quality control activities are new to the Belarusian system and there is some resistance to accept the concept. Dr. Polanskaya understands the principles and the need for it and began to implement some steps in this field. We will support her in this effort.

Due to VANAC failure to secure continuous supply of Abbott reagents for the analysis of hormone assays, we finally switched to BRAHMS as the principal supplier. Their reagents have a much longer shelf life, they are closer to Belarus and Ukraine and Ukrainians were already using BRAHMS reagents, so now both projects will be supplied by one company, hopefully without any problems.

The screening effort continues, but the new cases seem to be coming from the outlying areas, closer to Gomel and Minsk. The reliance is on the mobile teams. There is still the problem of non-responsiveness of the projected cohort members to invitations to join the screening. Various methods of enticement, reward and incentives have been discussed but no firm conclusion was possible due to the variety of proposals and counter proposals (money, candies, vitamins, T-shirts etc.)

Quarterly reports and trip reports for the last quarter are attached.

## 2. UkrAm Thyroid Project

The screening effort in Ukraine continues to be depending principally on the mobile teams. The innovation experimented with is to send out a bus to nearby locations to bring the candidates to Kyiv’s Institute of Endocrinology and Metabolism for examinations. People prefer to be examined at this Institute rather than at their local raion dispensaries for which they have little regard. This situation resurrected the idea of additional two “stationary” centers which were envisioned in the early stages of the project: Chernyhiv and Zhytomyr which could be used to supplement the examination centers. Several meetings were held between the staff of the Kyiv center and the oblast medical directors to discuss this expansion. Representatives of the Ministry of Health also participated in this effort and plans are being made to expand the catchment area to these new centers.

In light of some difficulties in the area of contacting and re-contacting prospective cohort members and overall low response rate, two individuals were hired to work as epidemiologists to cover the Chernyhiv and Zhytomyr areas with the idea of improving the participation in the

project, improve the notification and investigate the reasons for low compliance.

An informative meeting was held with the Ukrainian component of the BI-National Advisory Group. Dr. Tronko presented the historical development of the project and reported on the efforts of the screening teams. I have elaborated on the role of the Bi-National Advisory Group and the planned meeting to be held this spring. (This meeting was later canceled to be held later in the year). The group seems to be well chosen and ready for interaction with the American counterpart.

Dr. Mincey spent considerable time in Kyiv working with the laboratory personnel, the DCC staff and the epidemiologists. He was very positively impressed with the developments in Kyiv and in surrounding raions; he accompanied the mobile team on its excursion into the country.

The project seems to be well established, the principal equipment installed and operational. The main problem continues to be the timely delivery of expendable supplies and reagents which, because of the VANAC's termination, put us back again.