

Hospital “Outside the Walls” (HOW) against HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) in Russian Federation, Belarus and Armenia

Deborah Le Nogue¹, Cyriac Bouchet-Mayer^{1&2}, Gaya Isakhanyan¹, Michel Maric^{1&3}, Christophe Segouin^{4&5}, Marc Shelly^{1&4} (contact : marc.shelly@aremedia.org)

••• OBJECTIVES •••

The overall objective is to develop and implement a sustainable **Hospital “Outside the Walls” (HOW)** scheme designed by AREMEDIA Association to strengthen access to care and better meet the sexual health needs of key populations (KPs) in three East European and Central Asia urban areas.

This will be achieved by leveraging and sharing experience and expertise of all partners.

The roadmap involves three general milestones : establishing the collaboration with local stakeholders, building the project with an initial training program and first joint actions and assessment which includes a research component. The objectives are :

- Selecting local political leaders, field (community and specialized) associations and public health resources (HIV testing hospital centers)

- Contractualizing partnership with these different entities in Perm (Russian Federation), Minsk (Republic of Belarus) and Erevan (Republic of Armenia)

- Jointly designing a pilot project to adapt the AREMEDIA scheme HOW in Perm, Minsk and Erevan urban areas, three Russian-speaking regions with different epidemiological contexts

- Presenting at Perm State University Conference on “World AIDS Day”, November 29th 2019 :

 - the AREMEDIA interventional methodology

 - an innovative and challenging public health concept - the “democracy in health” that can be used among others to fight discrimination and social stigma against KPs resulting in late HIV diagnosis and untreated STIs

- Building together a training program for medical and associative stakeholders and to locally adapt and implement at a later stage the scheme provided by AREMEDIA

- Theoretical and field training in Paris (February 2020) of Russian, Belarusian and Armenian stakeholders to outreach comprehensive sexual health interventions towards various KPs, by associative and medical staff from AREMEDIA and its partner, the Fernand-Widal Hospital’s HIV screening center (Assistance Publique-Hôpitaux de Paris)

- Practical support by the AREMEDIA team to adapt and implement outreach actions in Perm, Minsk and Erevan urban areas

- Assessing among others how the system is adapted, handled and accepted by the different local medical and associative stakeholders (and targeted populations) in different countries of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region sharing the same language and comparable medical culture

- Collecting new data of epidemiological interest from the various KPs living in three countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia

- Presenting the preliminary results at the Saint Petersburg International Conference, July 2020

••• BACKGROUND •••

Sponsored by UNAIDS support program, Eastern Europe and Central Asia region struggles to curb its soaring HIV epidemic

In December 2018, French authorities invited Russian leaders of the strategy against HIV, medical institutions and civil society representatives to discover the practices of their French peers and to exchange on this matter. We presented the **Hospital “Outside the Walls” (HOW)** scheme designed by the French public health association AREMEDIA and developed since 2001 to reach underserved populations - in partnership with the Fernand-Widal Hospital’s HIV screening center (Assistance Publique-Hôpitaux de Paris) :

HOW consists of merging associative and medical cultures

- to create bonds with community or specialized associations targeting KPs overexposed to HIV

- to efficiently export free HIV and other STIs prevention, screening and link to care “outside the walls” of hospital facilities, towards hard to reach KPs far from public health resources.

In March 2019, AREMEDIA was mandated by the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs to identify dependable partners to transpose this methodology in Perm in the high-HIV burden Ural region (Russian Federation). Subsequently, contacts were established with Armenian and Belarusian authorities to set up simultaneously - and adapting it to the local context - in Minsk (Republic of Belarus) and Erevan (Republic of Armenia) the same HOW scheme successfully implemented long ago in Paris and Ile-de-France region, in order to demonstrate its adaptability and replicability in different countries and local contexts.

••• RESULTS •••

At the end of 2019 the first 5 objectives of the program will be achieved and its last 5 objectives will be later achieved according to the defined timetable and subject to the receipt of the grant applications submitted

- Local partners to be involved in each country in the implementation of HOW and instrumented to its sustainability have been identified :

LOCAL POLICY MAKERS
at the level of cities, regions and/or Regional or National Ministries of Health

HIV SCREENING CENTERS
Hospital facilities involved in screening of HIV and other STIs

COMMUNITY OR SPECIALIZED ASSOCIATIONS
supporting targeted KPs and foster their access to screening and care facilities

ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS
to closely collaborate with a French research team for the evaluation of the implemented process

- The pilot project has been developed, written and validated

- Partnership agreements are being finalized to be successfully concluded by the end of 2019 between AREMEDIA and Russian, Belarusian and Armenian authorities, local HIV screening centers and local community and specialized associations targeting KPs : sex workers (SW), injecting drug users (IDU), men who have sex with men (MSM), migrants (MG)

→ TRAINING PROGRAM

Designed in close cooperation between AREMEDIA and its different partners this training program is organized in four steps :

- Invited public communication on the specified topics at the Perm State University Conference on “World AIDS Day”, 29th November 2019

- Theoretical and field training (February 2020) of Russian, Belarusian and Armenian stakeholders to outreach global sexual health interventions towards KPs, by associative and medical staff from AREMEDIA and the Fernand-Widal Hospital’s HIV screening center in Paris, sharing of

 - French guidelines for screening and treatment of HIV and other STIs, combined prevention including Prophylaxis PreExposition (PrEP) in particular in the HOW framework

 - French current transition from strategy against HIV/AIDS to the new global sexual health promotion paradigm

 - French guidelines for public health territorial and populational diagnosis

- Involving each partner in several “outside the wall” actions carried out in the field by AREMEDIA association towards different Parisian KPs (SW, IDU, MSM and MG)

- Participation of Russian, Belarusian and Armenian partners at the 10th Paris Town Hall for a public lecture to exchange and compare public health approaches in the field of HIV and other STIs in Russia, Armenia, Belarus and France



••• CONCLUSION •••

- Consensus was reached on a **pilot training and research-action outreach program**, approved by Russian, Belarusian and Armenian authorities, medical institutions and associative stakeholders in three Russian speaking countries with different epidemiological contexts

- The program fosters sustainable switch of the Russian, Belarusian and Armenian strategies against HIV towards a comprehensive sexual health promotion paradigm.

- We aim at advancing access to local key populations with multifactorial barriers (including fear of stigma and discrimination) in their access to healthcare, resulting among others in a contribution to a destigmatization process of these key populations

- The ultimate enduring objective to be achieved is to set up the “Hospital Outside the Walls” scheme locally - in a sustainable way, after the pilot project has been carried out - and to help strengthen, improve and adapt the Belarusian, Armenian and Russian management strategies of the fight against HIV/AIDS to the needs of the populations most directly concerned by actively promoting sexual health, HIV/STIs screening and access to care.

MAIN MESSAGES

- Enhance socio-medical interface to reduce the “hidden epidemic” through access to hard to reach HIV key populations

- Support local stakeholders to promote equitable and sustainable management of HIV and comprehensive sexual health

1. Association AREMEDIA - 113 rue du Faubourg du Temple 75010 Paris, France.
2. Laboratoire SANTESIH - Université de Montpellier, 700 av. du Pic Saint Loup, 34090 Montpellier
3. Université de Reims, Champagne-Ardenne - 9 boulevard de la Paix, 51100 Reims, France.
4. Centre Gratuit d'Information, de Dépistage et de Diagnostic (CeGIDD) - University Hospital Saint-Louis- Lariboisière-Fernand-Widal, A.P.-H.P., 200 rue du Fbg St-Denis 75010 Paris, France
5. University Hospital Saint-Louis-Lariboisière-Fernand-Widal - Department of Public Health, Assistance Publique- Hôpitaux de Paris, 200 rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis 75010 Paris, France.