

THE MEDICAL NETWORK FOR
SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION IN THE FORMER
YUGOSLAVIA

**The Medical Network:
Training to Bridge Health and Peace**

**Report on a Meeting and Training Workshops,
Toplice, Slovenia, 24-27 September 1999**

[This report was prepared in December 1999.]

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Without the support of our sponsors and the hard work of our members, the Network would be unable to continue its important mission, which is to promote dialogue, cooperation, personal contacts, practical solutions, and the renewal of relationships in the area.

REPORT INFORMATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report describes a meeting and training workshops that were held in Toplice, Slovenia, in September 1999. The program was hosted by the Slovene Philanthropy in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The meeting and training workshops were organized by the Medical Network for Social Reconstruction in the Former Yugoslavia, whose history and purpose are described in Section II, below. Section III provides an overview of the Toplice program, which served a dual purpose. The meeting was an organizational meeting of the Medical Network. The training workshops were led by members of the Medical Network, and the workshop participants were also members of the Medical Network. All meeting participants participated as both trainers and/or participants in the training workshops. Section IV gives a summary of the training workshops. Section V provides an overview of the Network organizational meeting.

This report has two appendices. Appendix A is a list of the participants in the Toplice meeting and training workshops. Appendix B is a list of members of the Medical Network Contact Group.

II. HISTORY AND PURPOSE OF THE MEDICAL NETWORK

The Medical Network for Social Reconstruction in the Former Yugoslavia (network) is a network of health care professionals from all parts of the Former Yugoslavia. It is dedicated to the reconciliation of existing conflicts and the prevention of further conflicts in its region. It is founded upon two major beliefs. First, violent conflict and war are the ultimate threats to public health. Second, the medical community has a unique and crucial role to play in promoting a healthy society, not only by mending the physical and psychological wounds of individuals but also by rebuilding structures for public health care and creating bridges for community reconstruction and social reconciliation. To these ends, the Network aims to promote dialogue, cooperation, personal contacts, practical solutions, and renewal of relationships in its region.

The Network has evolved from its origins in 1991, as a small group that met sporadically in conjunction with meetings of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW). Now it is a network of over one hundred health professionals, including physicians, psychologists, university professors, teachers, and local and national government health-related ministers. Since 1993, it has convened annual meetings and has organized projects and training programs for medical professionals and medical students. Even during periods of extreme violence in the region, the Network has orchestrated broad-based participation and has brought together polarized parties. The Network was officially established in its present form in April 1997, at a conference in Graz, Austria. In April 1998, health professionals from more than 10 countries convened in Sarajevo to exchange knowledge and to plan collaborative

programs. In May 1999 the Network convened an international conference and series of training workshops for 82 participants. Of these, 56 participants were medical professionals from Macedonia and Kosovo. Fifteen participants were members of the Medical Network from parts of former Yugoslavia and from other parts of the world. Eleven participants were from three international aid agencies in the region, Care International, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Network functions through a "Contact Group" composed of a pair of representatives -- a medical professional and a medical student -- from each of 12 different geopolitical points throughout the former Yugoslavia. Through the Contact Group, communications throughout the former Yugoslavia are facilitated, to promote a multi-pronged strategy for action based on the following themes:

- Ongoing communication and collaboration in joint activities.
- Open information and knowledge exchange.
- Support for non-violent conflict management activities, including conflict prevention and post-conflict reconciliation.
- Pro-active development of programs to help spread ideas of peace and health.
- Spreading the basic ideas of the Network throughout the whole of society.

The Network's collaborative programs cover a range of content areas, including:

- refugees and resettlement;
- health care and social reconstruction;
- programs for youth and adolescents;
- professional training in trauma, psychosocial treatment and related program development;
- development of civil society through voluntary programs; and
- professional training in conflict management and reconciliation.

The Network enjoys cooperative relationships with international medical organizations, including the World Health Organization, the International Society for Health and Human Rights, and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

III. OVERVIEW OF THE TOPLICE PROGRAM

The Toplice meeting and training program was the second of two- associated events. The first event was a conference and training program convened in Ohrid, Macedonia, May 27-30, 1999. (This event is described in **The Medical Network as a Bridge to Health and Peace**, Report on an international seminar and training workshops, May, 27-30, 1999, Ohrid, Macedonia.)

The meeting and training workshops took place in Toplice from 24-27 September 1999. This event was convened to provide training to medical professionals who were unable to attend the meeting in Macedonia in May 1999, to refine the Medical Network's training program, and to provide training for trainers who were at the Macedonia meeting. Participation in the event was intentionally limited to allow the development of trust and intimate exchange. A list of the 13 participants is attached to this report as Appendix A.

One of the most important aspects of the Toplice event was the opportunity it provided to bring together estranged colleagues. Specifically, medical professionals from Serbia and Montenegro, who had been unable to attend the Ohrid meeting, came to Toplice. The Toplice meeting provided a very important opportunity for people from Serbia, in particular, to discuss the current situation in their country and to acknowledge the trauma they experienced throughout the period of the NATO bombing. Serbs expressed their gratitude to the rest of the Network for the support that members had sent, throughout the bombing letting them know they were not forgotten, were not alone, but were a part of a larger Network, a "safety net" as one person put it. From this "safety net," Serb participants expressed their concern, grief and guilt over the history of human rights abuses and violence in Kosovo.

At the Toplice meeting, the Network training program, as developed at the meeting in Ohrid, was further refined. Three central pillars form the core of the Network's training program. These are:

1. treatment of traumatic stress;
2. the use of volunteers to promote social reconstruction; and
3. the integration of community reconciliation with trauma recovery.

Network trainers in each of these three areas demonstrated their programs for the participants. Trainers and participants worked together to develop a process for training of trainers in order to further the dissemination of these concepts.

In addition, plans for a variety of exciting future programs were discussed at the Toplice meeting. Most ambitious of these was the training program to be held in Gracanica, in northeast Bosnia May 4-8, 2000.

IV. SUMMARY OF THE TRAINING WORKSHOPS

A. Workshop on stress and trauma

The trainer for the workshop on stress and trauma was: Professor Dean Ajdukovic, Ph.D., psychologist, University of Zagreb, and Society for Psychological Assistance, Zagreb, Croatia.

This workshop addressed the following topics:

- Stress, traumatic stress and trauma – outline of concepts, reactions to traumatic exposure and helping framework.
- Loss and grief – reactions, phases of the grief process and helping principles.
- Depression disorders in children – framework, recognition and distinction between depressive disorders and acute grief reaction.
- Psychosocial support for mental health care providers - prevention of stress and burnout

B. Workshop on the use of volunteers to help traumatized children and children with psychosocial difficulties

This workshop was run by Dr. Anica Miku Kos, consultant child psychiatrist, Slovene Philanthropy, Ljubljana, and Dr. Emir Kujuh, psychiatrist, OMEGA Health Care Center, Graz.

The workshop addressed the following topics:

- The use of volunteers to assist social reconstruction
 - ❖ Voluntary work and volunteers in social welfare, education, health protection and mental health protection.
 - ❖ The social function of voluntary work.
 - ❖ The connection and relation of the volunteer network with other supportive networks and professional services
- Potential mental health assistance activities of volunteers
 - ❖ Volunteers in the field of child mental health protection
 - ❖ The helping activities of volunteers - overview
 - ❖ The diversity of volunteer programs with a mental health content (examples from Slovenia and Bosnia).
- Recruitment and organization of volunteers
 - ❖ The organizational framework of volunteer activities
 - ❖ Selecting and training volunteers
 - ❖ Support and supervision of volunteers
 - ❖ Motivation, monitoring and evaluating volunteer programs
 - ❖ Preventing conflict between volunteers and staff

C. Workshop on conflict, conflict management and trauma recovery

This workshop was facilitated by Dr. Paula Gutlove, director of the International Conflict Management Program, Institute for Resource and Security Studies, Cambridge, MA, USA.

This workshop was a mixture of discussion and small-group interactive exercises. A briefing manual that was prepared for the Network conference and training

program in Ohrid in May 1999 was used for the workshop (**Health as a Bridge for Peace Briefing Manual**, IRSS, May 1999) and is available upon request.

The workshop addressed the following topics:

- Overview of conflict management and trauma recovery
- Reconstruction and reconciliation: the role of health care providers
- Active listening
- Active listening exercise: the impact of traumatic events
- Group reflection on acknowledgement
- Problem solving
- Positions, interests and needs
- Consensus-building exercise

V. SUMMARY OF THE NETWORK ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

The Network organizational meeting was facilitated by Drs. Paula Gutlove and Anica Kos. The facilitated dialogue provided important opportunities for organizational and developmental work for the Network, and plans were made for future Network activities. Subjects addressed were:

- Network - organizational needs:
 - ❖ Improved communication within the Contact Group
 - ❖ Information about Contact Group members
 - ❖ Funding and access to donors
 - ❖ Project partnerships and proposals for activities
 - ❖ Epidemiological data
- Network Offerings--what we can do right now:
 - ❖ Electronic newsletter every 3 months--update on what is happening in the region and within the Network
 - ❖ Concrete projects and partners defined
 - ❖ Proposal writing
 - ❖ Donor identification
 - ❖ Meeting facilitation, activities support
 - ❖ Training in a range of topics, information exchange
- Future Network Activities--things we might want to do in the future:
 - ❖ Encourage public dialogue and public education about health and peace
 - ❖ Convene meetings with health workers
 - ❖ Expand training programs
 - ❖ Engage social service sector in our work-- e.g., kindergarten, orphanage, health centers, refugee centers
 - ❖ Work with the media to spread information about the Network
 - ❖ Provide invitations to Network members to attend international meetings including:

- November 1999, Slovenia--Child psychiatry meeting hosted by Hamburg University
 - November or December 1999, Slovenia--volunteerism and youth
- General goals for all future Network meetings:
 - ❖ Network development-- have forums for discussion, to meet new and old friends, professional exchange, and plan future activities
 - ❖ Increase visibility of Network--use the media
 - ❖ Bridge international gaps
- Planning specific future Network meetings:
 - ❖ Next large Network meeting, spring 2000, Gracanica, Bosnia
Reasons in favor of Gracanica:
 - reliable local organizers and partners
 - continuation of ongoing Network program activities
 - broad scope of program possibilities
 - * kindergarten and other site visits
 - * meeting accessible to different communities
 - * medical professional and teachers' training
 - * young people to be involved
 - ❖ Network smaller meetings and training programs, fall 2000, options:
 - Novi Sad--pending information about visas and funding
 - Igalo--pending information about organization support
 - Macedonia -- need to explore options
 - ❖ Other meeting, training or seminar options
 - Igalo: training in development of voluntary action
 - Novi Sad: trauma recovery work with Suicide Hotline volunteers

Appendix A: Meeting and workshop participants

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