

Capacity Building in Armenian Medicine.

PRESS RELEASE

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Fund for Armenian Relief Fellowship Alumni Association Launches Local CME Program using the Salzburg Medical Seminars - a program of the Open Medical Institute of the American Austrian Foundation - as a Model

In the medical field, there is no question about the necessity for continuing medical education, but this is difficult to realize in nations where the transmission of information is slow, government funding is poor and resources do not often exist for the reeducation of professionals.

Beginning in 2003, the Fund for Armenian Relief Fellowship Alumni Association (FARFAA) began administering the Salzburg Medical Seminars Program in Armenia. FARFAA, a non-for-profit organization of medical professionals, who were fellows in the best US Medical Centers sponsored by Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR), seeks to improve the healthcare in Armenia by offering physicians a forum for the exchange of medical knowledge and information from around the world, thereby empowering physicians to gain greater personal and professional perspectives.

The Salzburg Medical Seminars have become the largest educational program for doctors in Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the former Soviet Union. The Salzburg approach aims to first educate a select group of English-speaking medical professionals who have a strong desire and clear ability to learn the latest advances in the medical field and who can then, in turn, share their gained knowledge and techniques with their peers.

Armenia's relationship to the Salzburg Medical Seminars actually spans back almost over a decade. "Since 1996, 185 doctors have gone to Salzburg where they have had the opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills in the best Austrian Medical Centers and learn advances in the field of medicine from US faculty members. These physicians then returned to Armenia and shared their new knowledge with others",- said Dr. Bella Grigoryan, coordinator of the FARFAA-Salzburg Medical Program, former Salzburg fellow and FAR fellow.

Given the success of this method, FARFAA decided to replicate the model of the OMI Salzburg medical seminars in Armenia by organizing local seminars in places like Yerevan, Vanadzor and Stepanakert, Artsakh. Its first local seminar, hosted in 2003, met with such an overwhelming positive response that FARFAA has organized more than 25 since that time. Topics have included "Atipic Pneumonia," "Hepatitis C," "Bone and Joint Trauma Surgery," "Outcomes Research," and other pertinent subjects to Armenian medicine today.

>From an educational standpoint, these local seminars are especially important because they efficiently bring medical information right

to the doorstep of Armenian physicians. FARFAA's April 2004 seminar titled "Advances in Stroke Management" with keynote speaker Dr.

Norbert Negoghossian of the Claude Bernard University in Lyon, France, was presented to over 200 physicians from all the provinces of Armenia and Artsakh. A Satellite Symposium in Anaesthesiology, jointly organized by OMI and FARFAA took place on July 25-26, 2005 in Yerevan. The faculty were from Weill Medical College of Cornell University and the symposium was sponsored by the Open Medical Institute and by FAR (Fund for Armenian Relief). About 150 anesthesiologists, from different hospitals of Armenia both from the capital and province attended. Some of the lectures during the symposium were "Opioids and Chronic Pain", "Neuropathic Pain: Current Concepts", "Interventional Pain Management" (by Dr. Sudhir Diwan), "Overview of Neonatal Physiology and Anesthesia", "Pediatric Airway Interventional Pain Management", "Management of Congenital Cardiac Problem for Non-cardiac Surgery" (by Dr. Aarti Sharma).

For one year FARFAA, has offered a new CME program for Armenian doctors. modeled on the OMI Salzburg Medical Seminars. Provincial Armenian physicians are invited to Yerevan for one month, where they are mentored by Salzburg fellows to improve their clinical skills and taught English and computer skills as well. Thirty two doctors have been trained to date and two have recently qualified to attend a Salzburg Medical Seminar, due to this training. The New CME program has got the financial support for FAR and Jinishian Foundation.

Physicians in Armenia applaud these new efforts for more reasons than the seminars in Armenia. <<I am looking for any chance to be trained mainly for skills and to help the other trainers and doctors as well.

I am sure with OMI' s and FARFAA's help and my dedication we will be able to make great advances in our health system>> explains Anoush Neressian, Salzburg fellow 2005, Sisian, Armenia

Dr. Gevorg Yaghjian, the coordinator of FARFAA local seminars and New CME program director is a former Salzburg fellow, as well as the coordinator of the local CME program Hambartzum Simonyan.

"FARFAA, implementing the model of the OMI Salzburg medical seminars provides a wonderful network for doctors to become informed about new achievements in the field of medicine , it sponsors the education of physicians from different regions of Armenia, using the knowledge and experience of former Salzburg fellows."--said Dr. Yaghjian.

FARFAA activities meet great support from Salzburg Medical Program OMI leaders in Austria. << I would like to convey my appreciation to the Salzburg fellows who are living examples of philanthropy! Our objective was to train the best of the best in Salzburg and we expected that they would help their colleagues, just as they were helped by their American colleagues. It is great that you have been able to implement this in Armenia! Keep up the excellent work!>> Katharine Eltz Aulitzky, OMI director.
