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Primary Health Care Revitalization in Azerbaijan

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Of Azerbaijan's 7,564,800 inhabitants, 52.2% live in urban and 47.8% in rural areas. With the transition to market-oriented economy, health problems have worsened. Expenditures for health care fell from 2.9% of GDP in 1990 to 1.2% in 1997. In case of illness, 37% of population prefer self-treatment, and 68% of treatment refusals are due to the inability of patients to pay for the treatment. Maternal mortality rate increased from 10.5 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1991 to 52 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1996. However, diphtheria has been reduced to sporadic cases, whereas polio has not been reported since 1996. A pilot reform of primary health care was initiated in one of the districts, and soon expanded to four more districts. The aims were the improvement of health management, rationalization/optimization through development of traditional services, organization of preventative activities, rational use of drugs, institution of sustainable financial mechanisms through affordable fees for services, drug sales within health facilities with corresponding management and the accounting systems for the revenues, development of the exemption system, and community participation in district health. Increased patient attendance to health facilities, improved access to the vulnerable population health services, empowered health system management, better quality of care, and reduced overall individual expenditures were observed.

Key words: assessment of health care needs; availability of health services; Azerbaijan; budgets; financial support; financing, government; financing; public; health insurance; health services administration; health transition