

Appendix 2.8

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Transcript of the "Russian Provinces" radio program broadcast on December 5, 2005.

Dear listeners, you are listening to the Russian Provinces program on the Narodnoye Radio. Your host today is Tatiana Fedyaeva.

Kaliningrad can hardly be called a provincial place. It is the westernmost city in the country, former Koenigsberg, who would call it provincial? But - it is over a thousand kilometers from Moscow. But – to reach this land you have to cross several state borders. But – its problems are typical for the smallest towns as well as for big cities...

Of course, we would like to tell you about its beautiful museum of amber; about natural reserve on Kurshsky spit; about luxurious seaside resorts like, for example, Svetlogorsk that foreign tourists love to visit, mainly Germans.

Today it is impossible to say who brought HIV to Kaliningrad, and from where. But it was this sea port where HIV/AIDS began its march across Russia. This was the place that first confronted the problem which by now became not just a medical one, not only social, but even political.

A short while ago Kaliningrad was an uncontestable leader in terms of HIV infections per 100,000 population. Now the region's place in these terms moved down to the bottom of the top thirty. Does this mean that things improved?

Today we are broadcasting from the regional Center for AIDS and Infectious Diseases Prevention and Combat. Tatyana Nikolayevna Nikitina, its Head Physician, is speaking:

TN: Our state-run regional institution was opened in 1989, one of the very first in the then USSR. It was here that an outbreak of HIV among drug users was recorded in 1996. First in Kaliningrad, and later across the region.

It is over 20 years now since the first patient was diagnosed here. But people still don't want to renounce their habitual stereotypes, believing that AIDS is a stigma of homosexuals and drug addicts. However, we – medical specialists from the Kaliningrad Regional Center for AIDS Prevention and Combat – do believe that the sexual transmission of HIV is dominating for many years by now. And this means primarily heterosexual contacts. More and more so-called socially safe people get infected every year.

In other words, Tatyana Nikolayevna, no one is safe...?

- Not quite so. Sometimes we hear how AIDS is called the plague of the 20th century. I disagree with this statement entirely, because in contrast to the plague, AIDS is a behavioral disease. The only barrier that can protect us from infection is our own attitude, our care for our own health, and our own responsible behavior. As for who has been diagnosed in our center... depends on how you look at it. In terms of occupation – these are students, ballet dancers, police officers, homeless people, bookkeepers, seamstresses, college and lyceum students, rather highly positioned officials, etc. etc. It's easier to list those who have not been... That is, occupation, age or social status does not play the role it used to play. A completely honest housewife is now at risk too.
- Really?
- Yes, really. An HIV-infected person's profile has changed. It used to be a male of 15 to 30 years old, an alcoholic or a drug addict; but according to the last year's data it is a man or a

woman about 30 or older, with a stable job and a family. Sometimes it is a student woman or a housewife. I remember a case when I had to inform a 70 year old man about this diagnosis... Every story is a tragedy...

- On your desk I can see a book called: "Doctor's Diary"...
- It was published by my colleague, Tatiana Ivanovna Tsarenko. The title is: "About AIDS and Other Things". The number of printed copies is microscopic; the entire book is based on absolutely real facts. And the opening sentence is: "The stories in this book are dedicated to people who are still healthy today..." I would really like the "Narodnoye Radio" listeners to read this book too.

TF: Hence – to people who are still healthy today.

Male voice reads:

- In the course of my practice I often meet teenagers, young people, and they make me wonder. July, peak of the summer. A teenage girl comes to visit me; she is pretty, not quite woman-grown yet. She is wearing a cute black top and light shorts. She is skillfully made-up; bangs are hanging down to her nose covered with small pimples. Her eyes are shining.
- I am here to find about my test results. You said nothing on the phone.
- Anya, tell me about yourself. Why were you taking the HIV test?
- The girl crossed her legs and began to explain flippantly:
- Well, we are here to – you know – it's hot and all that...
- Are you afraid to contract HIV?
- Yeah, it's summertime.
- Have you had unprotected sex?
- What's that?
- Have you ever had sex?
- Of course!
- Since when?
- Since I was thirteen.
- How many partners have you had?
- Per day?
- ...?!
- Have you never been young?
- Evidently, I have not. Do you use condoms frequently?
- Ouch, no, I don't like it!
- Are not you afraid of getting pregnant?
- Na-a.
- Have you ever tried drugs?
- Well, I had a shot or two, maybe more, I cannot remember now.
- Got treatment?
- Why? I am not a junkie.
- Anya, how many years of school do you have?
- Nine.
- No more school?
- No.
- Have you ever had a job?
- Now and then.
- Are you living with your parents?
- With mother and step-father. And a nine-year-old sister.
- What kind of relations you have with your family?
- Normal.

- Anya, your tests are not very good. We have found hepatitis C and HIV.
- What, do I have AIDS?

Tears spring to her eyes; she takes a handkerchief from her purse and sobs uncontrollably.

- Anya, have you heard anything about these diseases?
- Yes, I have, but I never thought that could happen to me.

I look at this teenage girl with her attitude to life and I wonder: does one really want to be young on these terms?

Music break.

TF: We continue the "Russian Provinces" program broadcast from the Kaliningrad Regional Center for AIDS Prevention and Combat. We are talking to its Head Physician, Tatiana Nikolayevna Nikitina.

TN: Each epidemic passes through three stages – incipient, concentrated and wide-spread, when one percent or more of all pregnant women are HIV-infected. The Kaliningrad region is currently stable at the second stage. We have succeeded in slowing down the epidemic. But this does not mean that we can forget the disease.

Male voice:

Ivan Sergeyevich – middle-aged, a bit chubby, with a large round bald spot – was the kindest man alive. His wife Nadya – nice, caring, welcoming woman, who makes your heart glow when you remember her. They were married for 15 years; they had two lovely daughters whom Ivan doted upon. It so happened that the family needed money all the time and they had to work a lot. Ivan kept several small stores; he started his business from the scratch and managed to generate moderate but stable income which was enough to feel secure.

Sitting in front of me today, he recalls one mistake he made back then...

Ivan used to visit our city quite often. He would come to the factory for scrap metal; he would personally deliver car parts. Transactions were of different nature, depending on luck. Once he had to stay overnight. He booked into a hotel. At night he went down to the restaurant for a bite, and stayed there for longer. Two young women were sitting at a table nearby; one of them asked him to dance. I have to mention that this seems to be a recent trend: women take initiative; perhaps men have become more shy or lazy?

Ivan was not particularly eager for a new acquaintance. But this time was somehow different. Something in Liudmila has touched a nerve. She was miniature, with bushy chestnut hair and soft charming voice. Ivan put his arm around her waist, and felt how his hand is sinking into her shirt. His wife used to be equally fragile when they first met many years ago.

Liudmila moved to his table, a conversation began. She said that she is celebrating her birthday here together with her girl-friend.

That's how it all began... Before he knew it, Ivan found himself in bed with her. When in the morning Liudmila asked him for a bit of money – allegedly for her daughter whom she was raising alone – he did not think it suspicious. On the contrary, that relieved him from responsibility of finding a present for her.

Each time Ivan went on a business trip since then, they would see each other. His sense of guilt became somehow muted; he loved his wife, but Liudmila was something different, special, a secret that warmed and excited his heart.

Two years passed this way. It was several months since Ivan saw Liudmila last. She called him, told him that she was ill, and asked not to call on her anymore. He learned from her girl-friend that she is hospitalized in serious condition. And finally, during his next visit, he learned that Liudmila has died from AIDS, and that she was a local hooker.

Ivan came to see me after a phone call. He was sitting on a chair mopping his sweating brow with a clean handkerchief and apologizing every minute or so. His hands were shaking.

- I wronged my family so much. I deserve what I got. But they are not guilty of anything. I am not condemning Liudmila. It turned out that she was selling herself for money. Her eyes were so sad. I don't know, if I could go back in time, whether I would have stayed away from this affair with her. The whole day yesterday I was reading about AIDS. Honestly, I used to believe that all this is a myth about junkies and such, I was sure it could have nothing to do with me. Tomorrow I am going home and I will have to tell all this to my wife. Probably I will have to leave my family, I am afraid they won't forgive me, especially my daughters. I love them so much. Tell my story to others. Maybe it will teach someone something...

Ivan Sergeyevich raised his eyes to look at me as if in search of an answer he could not find.

Music break.

TF: We continue the "Russian Provinces" program broadcast from the Kaliningrad Regional Center for AIDS Prevention and Combat. We remind you that we are talking today to its Head Physician, Tatiana Nikolayevna Nikitina.

TN: Two or three people come to our center daily. Every story is a tragedy. According to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, one person of 16 to 24 gets infected with HIV every 14 seconds worldwide. Thus, the number of HIV infections increases by 6 thousand people daily.

At the very beginning of the local epidemic (and this is a real epidemic, we can say this with certainty) only preliminary tests were available in Kaliningrad, and for verification we had to send samples to St. Petersburg. And we had no drugs here. Today the Center offers complete diagnostic examination; all patients will be assisted in receiving hospital treatment. You know, I would like to avoid moralizing, but the common wisdom that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure is directly applicable to HIV.

Male voice:

It is no secret that sexual services are flourishing in our city. Our staff repeatedly calls all these phone numbers in classifieds signed with all these intriguing nicknames: "Charmers", "Mulattoes", "Carefree Students", "Gentle Boys" etc. But we get no intelligent response to our suggestions to get tested for HIV and other diseases. So I want to tell you a story from my practice.

Larissa is registered with us for six months. She is a girl with no particularly good looks. Unemployed. Rents a two-bedroom downtown apartment together with two other girls. Dresses well, but not very tidily. She came to us complaining of feeling ill. Her legs were aching. She told us that she had syphilis recently (a month ago). She went through anonymous treatment. She is well now.

- The doctors told me that I am all right.
- How could you get syphilis? We told you that you should always use condoms when having sex. You are HIV-infected.
- What, am I supposed to tell a customer that I have AIDS? And also the guy we are working for will fire me on the spot.
- But you can infect many people!
- Well... usually I am working with a rubber...
- How could you get syphilis then?
- Sometimes customers insist. But this costs a lot more.

Here we are. AIDS and syphilis are available to customers for extra payment.

TN: I have already said that moralizing is not our business. But in case of HIV/AIDS I can say as a doctor that moral behavior is the best prevention. Although it applies only to the first stage of the

epidemic. Because when HIV-positive mothers have babies, you just rush to help them. Incidentally, do you know how nature sometimes appears to play games with people's lives? We had a case recently when an HIV-positive mother gave birth to twins. We were treating her during her term; we were following up her babies. Eventually we found out that only one of the two is infected.

Male voice:

Three mothers

A lioness.

A lioness stretched in tall grass. She was hungry. Her cubs were climbing over her, pulling at her dry nipples, but she had no milk for them. One of the cubs put its face right to hers as if trying to look into her eyes. She pushed it away, but the cub would not stop. The lioness took its little paw between her huge jaws and pressed gently. Then the mother licked the baby's soft belly a few times with her rough tongue, and after that she got up, shook herself, looked back on her babies, and headed on, to hunt, to feed her family.

Larissa

Larissa – pretty, young, well groomed – was sitting in front of me. She looked naïve and at the same time determined.

- I don't want to take my baby from the maternity ward. I cannot afford one. My husband is unemployed. We are all living on my father's pension. We can barely feed ourselves.
- Did you see your girl?
- Yes, she was brought to me.
- Do you understand that you are making her an orphan, that no one can replace her mother?
- Yes, I do. But I have no money for a child.
- Find a job as a street sweeper, an aid in a kindergarten, a janitor. You are young. And you are still strong.
- I don't want to.
- You have such a nice baby. Pretty like you are. And healthy! You can become a grown-up. And if somebody adopts her, you will regret it bitterly.
- I made a decision.

A colleague walks into the ward. Together we talk to the girl for a long time. She is adamant. We don't feel pity for her. Just sadness and hopelessness.

Katka.

Katka Khalayeva – a young Gipsy woman – came for an appointment with her child. The baby is well groomed, in a clean summer outfit. He is seven months old, and he is very active and lively for his age. His black hair is curly; his bright eyes scan the surroundings, and little hands are trying to grab everything within his reach on my desk.

Katka is infected. She knows it. But she hopes to get well.

- Doctor, I will do anything you say. Just treat me. I won't let anyone take my Fedyenka. I will take any job. I can do anything – laundry, cleaning, gardening, housekeeping. His father wants to take him from me because I am sick. No way! Right, Fedya? – she hugs and kisses the boy.
- I will get well. I know that there are drugs that even you don't know about, doctor... I am praying for all of you. I go to church. And my Fedyenka is baptized. We will go to the service today as well, - the young woman makes a sign of cross and continues. – I've been to my relatives the other day, and there is an old Gipsy healer living there. She said she will help me, and I'll get well, and Fedyenka will stay with me.

The baby smiled in his mother's arms. He was happy, healthy, full of joy. He knew that his mother would always protect him. And she would get well despite anything. And he would grow up to become a handsome tall man.

Musical break

TN.: Therapy is one of the gravest state-level problems here. And it must be resolved at the state level. See for yourself. Drug manufacturers sell their products for enormous prices. Meanwhile, in Brazil, for example, a life-long continuous treatment costs only about 50 to 80 dollars per months. And in our case it costs 800 to 900 dollars. Only ten percent of adult patients have access to therapy today. And what about children! This problem is impossible to resolve without governmental support.

HIV/AIDS in general presents so many problems to us that sometimes you don't know how to respond. A sewing woman comes to me: "My boss learned that I have HIV and tells me to leave." Shortly after that, a guy from the gas station: "What shall I do? They are firing me... they are afraid to get infected." That is, besides purely medical problems, social problems proliferate that are prompted by ignorance, lack of knowledge. These people are not contagious! This is another thing we must discuss. And we must not delude ourselves thinking that if we ignore the problem, it will simply go away. It will not.

TF: That is, you have to treat patients, and also to teach – so to say – an ABC of HIV/AIDS?

TN: We did a study at two student dormitories of two colleges, and we were astonished to discover how little young people know about HIV infection! They believe that a mosquito can infect them, and at the same time they are engaging in high-risk sexual practices. People need information. And not ad hoc information, but continuous, omnipresent. For the young and for the old, for children and teenagers, for fathers and mothers...

TF. This is what we were trying to do today. I remind you that you were listening to the "Russian Provinces" program on the Narodnoye Radio, broadcast from the Kaliningrad Center for AIDS Prevention and Combat. Our guest today was its head physician Tatiana Nikolayevna Nikitina; Vladimir Demidov was reading excerpts from doctor's diary by Tatiana Ivanovna Tsarenko. Tatiana Fedyaeva was your host, as usual.

All the best to you, and good bye!