

## Appendix 2.10

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Narodnoye Radio  
Moscow  
December 26, 2005

Transcript of Ulianovsk broadcast. Narodnoye Radio, December 26.

Good day, dear listeners!

This is the Russian Provinces program broadcast by the Narodnoye Radio. I am Tatiana Fedyaeva. Today we broadcast to you from Ulianovsk.

Music break

Tatiana Fedyaeva:

For some Ulianovsk symbolizes Communism because this is where Lenin was born and grew up. For others this is a beautiful city on Volga banks. For many – especially in the last fifteen years – this is the most depressed region in the country (the region and its capital consistently, year after year hold the 88<sup>th</sup> place out of 89 in terms of living standards, leaving behind only Chechnya). Recently the situation here began to improve. The newly elected Governor Sergey Morozov considers raising the standard of living in the region his top priority.

I am asking Sergey Nikolayevich what does this mean and how the regional government understands this brief definition:

S.M. – New jobs. Higher salaries. The city should regain its former reputation of a large academic and industrial center. And finally, urgent social problems should be resolved here. HIV/AIDS situation is among them. Today in terms of HIV/AIDS incidence we are number ten in Russia and number three in the Federal Volga District. Eighty percent of all cases are young people. One in every 40 residents of the region who are 18 to 19 years old is affected here. Curbing the spread of the disease is not just the task of the AIDS prevention and combat centers; this is the task for local executive and legislative authorities, for the entire society. Today we have preventive programs implemented at all major enterprises, for example, at the Avtozavod car plant and others; the Center specialists and volunteers are doing a lot...

Music break

This is the Russian Provinces program broadcast by the Narodnoye Radio. I am Tatiana Fedyaeva.

T.F. To find out what the Center for AIDS Prevention and Combat is doing, we will go to visit it.

Recording made in a taxi cab. Natural sound: street noise, engine running:

T.F.: Can you take us to Narimanova street?

...: Get in. Where to on this street?

T.F.: To the AIDS Center...

... I don't know what that is.

T.F.: How long are you living in town?

...: Since 76.

T.F.: And you mean that you know nothing about HIV/AIDS?

...: And I don't want to know.

T.F. I heard that one in every forty young people are affected in our region. You can say that there is one such person in every class in every college...

...: I don't know. No one I know is like this. If they were, I would not keep acquaintance with them.

T.F.: And what about your children?

...: What about them? They are normal children. They are already grown-ups. Switch off your tape recorder. I don't want to discuss this subject.

T.F.: Frequently we act like little children, closing our eyes and ears, insulating ourselves from the world. Childhood illusion that even people of mature age are suffering from: if I can see nothing and hear nothing, that means there is no problem. But it does exist regardless of our closed eyes.

Sofia Khabbrakhmanovna Ibragimova, Head Physician of the Ulianovsk Regional Center for AIDS Prevention and Combat:

- Ulianovsk is among the top ten most threatened Russian regions. But I hope that we will move out of this list by next year. The number of identified cases is steadily declining here in recent years. But in 2000-2001 we had such an outbreak, a real HIV epidemic here. This is what made us "leaders". And we are still among the top ten. Actually, we are number 10. But in 2005 we are again observing certain growth, which had actually been forecast by Vadim Valentinovich Pokrovsky, Head of the Russian Center for AIDS Prevention. And this concerns other regions besides Ulianovsk too. And we should expect more growth next year.
- How do you explain this?
- We can say that incidence has stabilized, but I am an epidemiologist, and I know that in 11 months we sometimes can observe a 7 to 8 percent growth in comparison to the same period of the previous year. This is explained by increased sexual transmission. However, sexual transmission will not be the same as among drug users – what we had in 2000-2001. But we are very concerned by this fact because it will increase the number of children born to HIV-infected mothers.
- When I was entering your Center just now, I noticed that many visitors here come with children...
- Out of over 500 children born here to HIV-infected mothers, the same diagnosis was confirmed in 30 cases. For about 170 HIV-negative children we have discontinued the follow-up. Others we will still follow until they reach eighteen months of age. Therapy that we are using now, as well as the rest of Russia, treating pregnant women, is quite effective. But this depends on the mothers as well. That is, if they are taking therapy correctly and lead a healthy life, then the result is good. Voronin from the St.Petersburg children's hospital notes the same, and our republican center too, and our experience confirms this too. Because in case of these thirty children whose diagnosis was confirmed... First, at the beginning of the epidemic we were not treating pregnant women and children, and then there are some who were not consistent in taking drugs, and also a few (very few) women who were taking therapy but still gave birth to infected children.

Another fact: one in every 40 teenagers of 18 to 19 years old is HIV infected here. 82 percent of all HIV infections here are under 30. However, now we notice a slight trend among older people... And among teenagers the most frequent now is sexual transmission.

T.F.: Ulianovsk region together with Buriatia are the two pilot regions where resource centers are created and wide-range awareness campaigns are implemented...

S.I.: I am very grateful to this project. This is a big contribution indeed. Prior to it we never published information materials (simply had no funds for this), never had all these billboards, posters, banners, PSAs. Never had classes where our specialists and volunteers were trained, and our

teachers – those were practical trainings, an entirely new method. What were we doing previously? We were lecturing, we spoke on the radio, we trained teachers. But all this just verbally, with no training aids. Now this is elevated to a higher, more modern way.

The point of this project is to increase public awareness. That is, what needs to be done today to stop or at least to lower infection rate through sexual transmission. Whatever people say, we do need sexual education. And public awareness. These are two points the project was dealing with.

Previously we were working mainly in Ulianovsk. We were traveling to other towns, of course, but very infrequently. We were training teachers at the Professional Education Institute. Their attitude was very often like this: "I have a neighbor Vanya. How do you think I am going to discuss condoms with him?" That is, it was difficult to overcome this psychological barrier. It is still difficult even for us – medical specialists. Of course, it is possible to take this stance: I am so highly moral; I believe that each person can have only one sexual partner in life – his or her spouse. Sure, go ahead! This would be wonderful. But real life is what it is.

Yes, there are already people who can say it loud: we need to use condoms. But how to do it correctly? Here too we have a breakthrough. They gathered school principals and trained them in techniques of sexual education. And I believe that this is one of the most important contributions made by this project.

T.F. Many organizations that work in the area of AIDS prevention prefer to do it through schools. This is easier: here are your classes, your student groups. You don't have to convince anyone to stay and listen...

S.I.: It so happened that our car plant is in the most neglected state. Although they have their own radio station and a newspaper... Our epidemiologist was giving lectures there. But without much effect. The plant together with some other enterprises here was targeted by the project. They changed their approach to this work. It began to depend more on the people. We often hear that funding is necessary. Yes, this is true. But people are much more necessary. People who are willing to help. People who understand the scope of this problem and work on it.

We began to distribute information materials. Not like typical sanitary booklets – boring and dull, but well printed, stylish, bright. Look at these calendars, bags, notebooks, pendants: they all contain necessary information. You cannot avoid reading it. And eventually people might start thinking about their health and their behavior. Everybody wants to stay alive!

T.F. Are there any barriers that HIV cannot cross?

S.I.: We used to speak about high-risk groups in the past. Today this expression is out of circulation. Because previously we were focusing on drug users. They were injecting and getting infected. That is, this was a certain limited milieu. Today the main way of transmission is sexual. If we look at the international picture, these are mainly promiscuous people. But today we see the following: boys and girls who got infected back in 2000 are today married, and newly infected cases are their sexual partners...

I always feel hurt when I hear that HIV infection only affects the scum of society. That is, junkies and hookers... As for the commercial sex workers, we have no statistics to this effect. We do not register higher incidence rate among them than among other population groups. So even at the very outset of the epidemic thoughtful medical specialists were saying that anyone can get infected – from a street bum to a president. This statement is still valid.

T.F. Are you saying that you or I have every chance to...

S.I. Yes, why not? There is a new way of transmission today: tattoos, piercing, all these rings etc. And what about children born to HIV-positive mothers – are they a risk group? And what has happened in Voronezh? Although I believe that the media have exaggerated their coverage a bit, but nevertheless, infection was transmitted through blood preparation transfusion... We too had three

people infected by blood donors in 2001. How does this happen? A donor donates blood, and his test today is negative. Three or four months later he comes back – and it is positive. In our case it was identified by the hemotransfusion station itself. We have found these people later. That is, lab diagnostics is imperfect. This is a problem too. We have to remember that a person becomes contagious from the moment of getting infected and to the end of life. And antibodies that we identify through lab tests become apparent at various stages with different people – with some after four weeks, and with some – after three months...

T.F. That is, this is another Ulianovsk problem?

S.I. Not at all. This is a worldwide problem. This immunoassay test is used worldwide. Internationally, it happens that sometimes test results are given after one year. First we confirm everything, and only then we would tag a person in this way.

T.F. You have a red paper tulip on your desk...

S.I.: The sooner a child gets necessary knowledge, the less is the probability of getting infected. This red tulip symbolizes hope. It is made by a child. This is a symbol that we will win, that infected people won't be discriminated.

T.F.: On my way to your office I was talking to my taxi driver. He dismissed this subject; he said that he does not want to discuss it...

S.I.: For some reason people are not afraid of hepatitis and other infections transmitted in the same manner. Clinical manifestations and treatment of hepatitis C are no better than HIV. Perhaps we, medical specialists, are at fault too – we frightened people too much with AIDS. And fear does not help to fight. Information is much better.

Musical break.

T.F. Dear listeners, we continue our Russian Provinces program. Today we broadcast from Ulianovsk and we discuss HIV/AIDS issues. Our guest today is Sofia Khabbrakhmanovna Ibragimova, head physician of the Center for AIDS Prevention and Combat.

S.I.: Our main concern today is discrimination. Children are growing up; it is time for them to go to kindergartens. How will they be treated there by other children or by adults? Then they will go to school... This is why we focus our attention today on schools, teachers, educators. There is discrimination at workplace. Our city is small, and patients themselves prefer to quit their job rather than face negative attitude. Frequently they are just required to quit.

T.F. Ulianovsk has chosen its own path of development in its time. Many viewed it as a natural reserve of socialism, of communist ideas. And many believed that for this reason the city and the region were a stronghold of high morals. Well, this stronghold has not endured the test of AIDS...

S.I. We should have taken very serious measures to combat the infection spread a long time ago. I have suggested many projects where we could have participated. But all of them always have to be approved by the authorities. And they were not approving. So we never participated in these projects, we were working in old ways. And of course, if it were not for the ID way of transmission, we could have survived this time peacefully. But in 1997-1998 we got an outbreak of hepatitis in one of our towns – Dimitrovgrad. And we knew already from Ukraine and Krasnodar examples that hepatitis is always followed by HIV. Besides, precisely because of social problems the number of drug users increased dramatically here. So that was the combination of reasons. And also add to this

the drug traffic route: Samara – Dimitrovgrad – and so on... All these factors brought this negative outcome. Such an explosion!

Sometimes I call HIV a behavioral disease. A lot depends on people themselves. Today the main way of transmission is sexual. We need to remember that. In principle I endorse continence. But life is life. Moments happen. Individual protection measures must not be ignored. And the vertical way of transmission! If women want children, they have an opportunity to give birth to an HIV-free child. But please observe all the rules, all the recommendations offered by medical science! This is the only way to curb the disease advent.

T.F.: There is this national priority healthcare project implemented today...

S.I. We are placing great hopes on it. Previously we used to treat only those patients who were in the third phase of this disease. We were not inviting patients sometimes, we went to visit them, we were asking them to come to us. But so far only 61 percent of all cases are registering and coming for follow up (people reason logically – why would I register, if no one is going to treat me, but publicity is possible?). Today, when we will be able to offer treatment – and it is supposed to be funded by the federal budget – we will continuously treat over 500 people. We will offer therapy and diagnostics. It is important to study their immune system. Viral load depends on it. If we are able to identify this viral load, we will start treatment immediately!

Musical break.

T.F. We continue our broadcast from the Ulianovsk Anti-AIDS Center. Our interviewee is one of its patients.

I am registered here for five years. I come here regularly, pass tests, get recommendations for treatment... I believe that everything will be all right. I was shocked to learn that I am HIV positive. I never thought that it could have happened to me. Then I got used to it. I am single. People near to me know about me and understand. And people who are not close don't need to know. One thing is certain: this is my own fault. When I learned about it, I withdrew from everyone, I did not want to live. But eventually things find their proper places. My proper place now is to be careful about my health and to take treatment. What else can I say? This is it... This is self-inflicted; we have punished ourselves. Of course, I am sorry for the children born to such people – they can be sick too. So we are also punishing our future. You just understand it when it is too late.

There must be more information available. I was lacking it. No one is safe from this tragedy. We must remember it. As for drugs... It is better never to try it.

T.F. "There must be more information available" – believes our HIV-positive interviewee. We were trying to provide it in our program. I remind you that we were broadcasting from the Ulianovsk Center for AIDS Prevention and Combat. Your host was I – Tatiana Fedyaeva. All the best to you, and good bye.