

The Mother Kangaroo Method in Albania

**Information on the visit of the Dr. Hector Martinez in Albania,
between 28 September - 4 October 2003,
within IFAD/UNOPS PASARP - Programme of Activities
in Support of Albanian Regions and Prefectures.**

Foreword

In May 2003, the Minister of Health and a number of Albanian neonatologists and health authorities stressed the necessity of improving the quality of mother and child care within the specialized hospitals. As a result of such a recommendation, meetings were organized and carried out by UNOPS/PASARP with local health authorities and professionals at Tirana, Vlora, Durres and Shkodra Maternity Hospitals. It was mentioned that Kangaroo Care methodology was very well known in Albania, although its systematic application was not satisfactory. The methodology was considered to be highly effective, if applied through a national protocol.

Kangaroo Care methodology was known and sporadically experimented at Tirana Maternity Hospital, while it was less understood or not implemented at all outside of the capital. The method was fairly disseminated by a core of Tirana professionals, with the technical assistance of Dr. Adriano Caetano (Trieste) who provided a few training courses for Albanian neonatologists and pediatricians seven years ago.

Albanian neonatologists and obstetrician Andrea Gudha, Eduart Tushe and Orion Gliozheni edited a manual about Kangaroo Care in 2000 year. Outside Tirana, there were an enthusiastic environment of determined doctors and nurses that believe that the methodology could really improve the quality of life of mothers and newborns. Head of Office and officials of WHO Tirana confirmed their strong interest in supporting a wide application of Kangaroo Care in Albania.

Through IDEASS, Dr. Héctor Martínez, one of the inventors of the methodology, agreed on carry out a short mission to Albania and a number of activities were organized, in tide coordination with national and local Albanian health authorities. IDEASS was in charge for the international coordination of the mission, including transport costs, while UNOPS/PASARP supported logistic and operational costs in Albania. As agreed for IDEASS promoted initiatives in Albania, Academy of Science of Albania provided logistic and technical support for the national conference. National health professionals and authorities organized and joined a number of scientific and protocol activities, including two field visits.

Tirana and 1st field visit. Tirana Maternity Hospitals

During his mission in Albania (28th September – 4th October 2003), Dr. Martínez met with officials of the Ministry of Health.

He also paid a 1st field visit to both Tirana Maternity Hospitals where he met with the Director, Dr. Rubena Moisiu. He held meetings with the Chief of the Neonatology Service Dr. Eduart Tushe, and Dr. Orion Glozheni co-authors of Mother Kangaroo Care Albanian book.

After visiting the Premature Intensive Care Unit, Dr. Martínez met with nurses and midwives of both hospitals to discuss about their current methodologies and the benefits of the introduction of this method. The paramedical personnel expressed interest, but also fears on changing the care method based on incubators use.

Dr. Martínez and Dr Tushe talked about success' stories, trying to reinforce the paramedical personnel confidence on the implementation of the method.

Tirana Maternity Hospital director and physicians also met informally with Dr. Martínez, in a very friendly and cooperative atmosphere.

The National Conference on Mother Kangaroo Methodology

On 1st October, a *National Conference on Kangaroo Care* was organized in co-operation with the Albanian Ministry of Health and WHO. The event was hosted by the Academy of Sciences, in the framework of the implementation of *IDEASS*, for the transfer of innovative technologies in Albania.



About 130 national and international professionals were present to the event.

150 "Mother Kangaroo" IDEASS brochures, written by Dr. Martínez and translated into Albanian, were distributed to the participants. 150 copies of the guidelines on "*The handling of a baby using the Mother Kangaroo method*" worked out by Dr. Martínez were also given out. The document illustrates the five easy steps to carry out successfully the methodology.

The Chairman of the Academy of Sciences, Dr.Ylli Popa, attended the conference, and welcomed Dr.Mártinez. The Deputy Minister of Health, Dr.Eduard Harshorva, addressed the opening speech and highlighted the great value of the introduction of this method in some selected Albanian Maternity Hospitals.

The Director of Tirana Obstetrics and Gynecology, the Directors of Public Health Departments from the Regions of Durres, Shkodra and Vlora, jointly with directors, neonatologists/pediatricians and nurses/mid-wives from regional Maternity Hospitals attended the conference. Also a number of famous pediatricians participated to the event. Dr. Eduart Tushe, Chief of Tirana Maternity Hospital, focused on the Albanian doctors' attempts on Mother Kangaroo Care implementation. He stressed the relevance of the presence of Dr. Martínez in Albania. Dr. Linda Spahiu, Director of the Christian Children Fund, urged the doctors, nurses and midwives present at the conference to disseminate by all means the positive aspects of this simply miraculous method in all remote areas of the country.

Albanian Ministry of Health invited health authorities and neonatology/pediatrician specialists from other regions of the country: Korca, Elbasan, Fier. At the end of the event, the Deputy Minister of Health, Dr. Eduard Harshorva, committed himself in supporting the national implementation of Kangaroo Care methodology. Representatives from WHO, UNICEF, USAID, UNDP, WB, international NGOs, the Health Office from the Italian Cooperation also attended the event.

The event was reflected by almost all main Albanian newspapers and TV channels. The conference was covered by reports of Top Channel, Klan, Shijak TV, Vision Plus and Alsat. Professionals from Fier Maternity Hospital committed themselves in implementing Kangaroo Care in their area, since they were convinced about the positive impact of the methodology.

Published articles

“Mother Kangaroo, babies close with their mothers” in Republika newspaper; “Mother Kangaroo lifts the incubator” in Koha Jone newspaper;

“Mother Kangaroo for premature babies” in Dita newspaper;

“Mother Kangaroo, the method will be extended in two more cities” in Korrieri newspaper;

“National Conference for implementing Mother Kangaroo” in Albanian News Agency and Albania newspaper;

“A new treatment for babies with problems” in Sot newspaper;

“Babies more healthy with the method of Mother Kangaroo” in Panorama newspaper.

Meeting with Albanian professionals

On 2nd October Dr. Martinez spent a working day with professionals from Tirana, Vlora, Durres and Shkodra regions, with the main aim of drafting the strategy for the implementation of Kangaroo Care Method, taking into account the specificity of each area. The following professionals attended the meeting:

Dr. Héctor Martínez – UNOPS/PASARP/IDEASS Adviser

Eduart Tushe - Chief of Neonatology Service, Tirana Maternity Hospital

Maksim Qejvani - Vlora Public Health Director

Zhuljeta Derraj – Chief of Neonatology Department, Vlora Maternity Hospital

Lirije Demaliaj – Director of Shkodra Maternity Hospital

Dhurata Kraja – Neonatologist, Shkodra Maternity Hospital

Nadire Kertusha - Durres Public Health Director

Kozma Misja – Obstetrician, Durres Maternity Hospital

Dhurata Besholli - Chief of Neonatology Service, Durres Maternity Hospital

The objective of the meeting was to set up a procedure for the implementation of Mother Kangaroo method within the above mentioned districts, under the overall supervision of Dr. Martínez. Dr. Eduart Tushe, Chief of Neonatology Service, Tirana Maternity Hospital was the facilitator of the meeting.

All participants admitted they already knew the method. They did not enforce it because they find hard to change the mentality of personnel and mothers, which only called for incubators. They stressed that they all apply the *rooming in* (in some cases partially). All Albanian professionals stated their confidence towards the method and their will to cooperate for its implementation.

Vlora health representative and neonatologist, affirmed that Vlora Maternity is under reconstruction; this circumstance would offer the opportunity for putting adequate spaces at disposal of the methodology. They stressed on the fact that Kangaroo Care should be disseminated among paramedical personnel and mothers.

Shkodra Maternity Director raised the problem of the heating of the rooms where “*mother kangaroos*” are supposed to stay. Shkodra neonatologist also mentioned the fact that they should work with mothers and personnel to convince them on the advantages of the method.

Durres neonatologist highlighted that the method is known but not implemented in Durres Maternity Hospital. Durres Maternity implement *rooming in* only partially. The Director of Durres Health Department mentioned as difficulties the need to have permanent water, electricity supply and showers.

Dr. Martínez illustrated how to change the attitude towards the premature babies and how to shorten their hospitalization period adopting Kangaroo Care methodology. He advised them on how to avoid gastric reflux by correctly positioning newborns. Finally, he illustrated deeply the guidelines he drafted on "*The handling of a baby using the Mother Kangaroo method*".

Recommendations of the meeting

Kangaroo Care pilot projects will be implemented in Tirana Maternity 1 and 2, and in Maternity of Shkodra, Durres, Vlora and Fier. 5 small Trainer Units, composed by 1 physician and 1 midwife, will be established in pilot centers. They will be in charge for the training of the personnel pertaining to these institutions.

Tirana Maternity professionals will elaborate the project for information and divulgation materials.

UNOPS/PASARP will reproduce brochures and other information/divulgation materials (leaflets, spots, video tapes etc) for distributions.

A supervising system should be put in place, in order to monitor the implementation process and provide technical assistance to the field professionals. The successful implementation of Kangaroo Care pilot projects could be utilized as a study source for physicians, nurses and sociologists.

A cost analysis in cooperation with UNOPS/PASARP has to be foreseen to ensure the feasibility of the project.

Dr. Eduart Tushe was selected as national focal point for the elaboration of the final strategy, to be submitted to the Ministry of Health.

2nd Field visit. Shkodra Maternity Hospital

On 3rd October, Dr. Martínez and Dr. Tushe paid a field visit to Shkodra Maternity Hospital. A practical exercise was carried out: they held a demonstration of how easy is to put Kangaroo Care into practice. It was extremely touching to see happy mothers keeping their babies in Kangaroo position. The practical demonstration was followed by questions and exchange of experience among the professionals.