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BIPAI's pediatric AIDS center in Romania grows up

HOUSTON – (Dec. 6, 2007) – A center that opened in Romania in 2001 to help young children with HIV/AIDS survive for longer periods is now adapting to its success with an expanded focus of caring for the adult needs of these individuals.

This week, formal ceremonies were held to dedicate the Baylor International Pediatric AIDS Initiative's Romanian Clinical Center of Excellence. The center is a joint program of the Infectious Diseases Hospital Constanta, Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital.

"We are adapting to changing needs," said Dr. Mark Kline, president of BIPAI, professor of pediatrics at BCM and chief of the retrovirology clinic at Texas Children's. "We are dealing with issues today that we couldn't have imagined a decade ago. At the time, we were just concerned with keeping the children alive for another month, another year. And today, we find that the HIV care is a relatively minor part of what we are doing. We are much more involved with primary medical and psychosocial needs."

BIPAI opened the state-of-the-art Romanian-American Children's Center in 2001, with funding support from the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word and Abbott Laboratories, to provide outpatient care to the hundreds of HIV-

infected children in the area. At the time, the situation was grim, with children dying at a high rate.

As a result of the center, the mortality rate dropped from 15 percent in 2001 to 1 percent in 2006.

Now many of those children are in their late teens and early 20s, with different issues to face. Kline said the decision was made to transition the program, rather than transition the patients away from the center to an adult program.

“We’re choosing to expand our own range of services to accommodate the entire age range from infancy to adulthood,” Kline said. “We will continue to provide medical and psychosocial services to these individuals, but we’re also going to tackle issues like housing and job training, education and subjects surrounding marriage and family.”

The Center of Excellence will provide services under the same roof, including programs in infectious diseases, pulmonary diseases, gynecology and dental care; psychosocial and vocational counseling, social assistance, family planning and support groups; and education for healthy independent living.

The Center also will educate and train health professionals and develop a research department.

Sustaining funding for the Center of Excellence is provided by the Abbott Fund.

Kline was joined at the dedication ceremonies by BIPAI vice-presidents Nancy Calles, Michael Mizwa, David Jones and Sebastian Wanless; Ana Maria

Schweitzer, executive director of BIPAI's Baylor-Black Sea Foundation; Dr. Sorin Rugina, manager of the Constanta Infectious Diseases Hospital; and Dr. Suzan Ibram, an official with the Public Health Authority of Constanta, as well as other government officials, members of the BIPAI team, BCM and Texas Children's representatives.

A special guest at the dedication was Dr. Gabriel Anabwani, executive director of the Botswana Baylor Children's Center of Excellence. The Romanian clinic served as a model for the Botswana clinic, which opened in 2002. BIPAI now operates seven centers of excellence in Africa, along with the Romanian center.

Kline and the BIPAI team also participated in the dedication of a new housing complex that includes the Flower House, a program that houses and teaches independent living skills to abandoned or orphaned HIV-infected adolescents, and the Baylor Habitat House, three studio apartments for those who are now independent adults.

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