

## **PSI Romania Promotes Informed Choices for Women Regarding Reproductive Health**

PSI Romania, a non-governmental organization that social markets health care products, began a series of educational workshops in September 2002 for women regarding reproductive health issues. The goal of the program is to inform women between the ages of 17 and 40 about the types of contraceptive methods available to them, and to encourage them to make responsible choices regarding their reproductive health and family planning.

The program, which began in August of 2002, has already conducted over 6,000 workshops and reached over 105,000 women in twenty different judets. The workshops are conducted where there is a high concentration of women workers, which is, for the most part, in textile factories. PSI arranges the workshops with factory representatives and women interested in learning more are invited to attend. The workshop is scheduled either before or after work shifts or during lunch breaks. “The fact that many women are willing to come to work early, or stay late, or use their lunch break to hear what we have to say indicates that we are filling a need, that what we are providing is important,” says Dr. Anka Purdel, one of nine medical doctors currently implementing the program for PSI.

This is especially true for Vera, a 23 year old garment worker who attended a workshop in Bucharest in September. “It was very good for me to hear that I have choices and that I am responsible for making the right choice for me.” She added, “Of course I learned some of this in school, but it helps so much to hear it again now that I am older and have a boyfriend, and to hear it with people like myself who probably have questions but never a good opportunity to get these questions answered.”

The workshop can last anywhere from 30 minutes to one hour, depending on how much time the women have and the number of questions asked. “Most of the questions regard birth control pills, because there is still a lot of misinformation about this product since it was not available for many years,” according to the Program Manager, Dr. Mario Grigorascu. “But,” Dr. Grigorascu adds, “we also get questions about the calendar method, IUDs, condoms, everything as long as the participants are comfortable with the presenter, then we get it all!”

The workshop facilitators are all medical doctors and stress to the participants that they not only have a right, but a responsibility to make informed decisions about their reproductive health. The doctors explain all methods of family planning and protection from sexually transmitted diseases, including abstinence, use of condoms, birth control pills, IUDs, and spermicides. The doctors stress that women should have control over the method they choose, and that they should be responsible in making this decision. “Part of our motivation is definitely to decrease the number of abortions, because we feel that number is too high,” says Dr. Grigorascu. “Since the fall of communism, we have these birth control products available but people still are hesitant to use them, and we want to change that. These workshops give us the perfect opportunity to do just that.”

PSI has expanded the program into 20 counties; the Medical Representatives conduct an average of 20 workshops per month, with an average of 15 women in each workshop. “The whole point is to empower women with knowledge so that they can make reasonable and responsible choices about their sex lives,” Dr. Purdel emphasized.



***Session in Apaca Factory***

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