

# ***HEPATITIS CONTROL IN ALBANIA – public health challenges***

**Silvia Bino**

**INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC HEALTH, TIRANA,  
ALBANIA**



“ Life can only be understood  
backwards; but it must be lived  
forwards.”

Kierkegaard



# *Decades of a dark journey*

## ➤ Before 1990

- Low testing rates and lack of tests
- Lack of continuous blood screening
- Reusable syringes and needles
- Lack of disposable syringes
- Lack of disinfectants and no infection control programs in hospitals
- Lack of vaccination program
- Lack of awareness



# ***FEAR OF HIV/AIDS AND NEW PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS***

- Introduction of mandatory blood screening in 1990 (*first case of HIV – 1993*)
- Introduction of mandatory disposable syringes and needles in 1993.
- Establish the first infection control program in 1993 in Tirana University Hospital Centre.
- Establish community support program for MSM



# *Acknowledging Hepatitis B epidemic*

- Data from migrants in Italy and Greece
- Documenting Hepatitis B in Albania
- Albanian seroprevalence studies



# *Acknowledging Hepatitis B epidemic*

**Documenting Unspecified Viral Acute Hepatitis in Hospital Based National Surveillance System in 1995.**

- **All suspected unspecified hepatitis cases had to be reported** at DPH and monthly to IPH.



# *The introduction challenges of Hepatitis B vaccination*

- 1993 – Vaccination of risk groups - health care workers ( not regular )
- **1994 - 1996 - Introduction of Hepatitis B vaccine in newborns from a donation of Rotary Club International**
- 1997 - 1998 – Lack of funding to maintain Hepatitis B vaccination.
- **1999 – First funding of Hepatitis B vaccination from Albanian Government**
- The challenge to maintain the funding



# ***GAVI and Hepatitis B prevention (2001 -2005)***

- 2000 – GAVI application for Hepatitis B funding
- 2001 – 2005 – **GAVI funding of Hepatitis B vaccines and improving of vaccination**
- **Introduction of AD syringes in vaccination program in 2000.**
- A newborn vaccination policy and guidelines
- **Documenting vaccination at birth and within 24 hours**
- Documenting newborn and infant Hepatitis B vaccination at every district.
- **Preparation of the first Hepatitis Control Plan of Action - 2003**



# *Hepatitis B vaccination*

- Since 2005 fully funded by Albanian Government
- Documenting Hepatitis B vaccination within 24 hours of newborn and infants at every commune
- Maintain high coverage starting from 95% in every commune
- Introduction of Hepatitis B vaccines in private market



# *Hepatitis B vaccination strategy 2005 until 2008*

- Mandatory vaccination at birth
- Vaccination of risk groups:
  - health care workers,
  - injecting drug users,
  - MSM, and
  - Roma population



# ***Vaccination strategy beyond 2008***

- **Mandatory vaccination at birth**
- **Mandatory vaccination of adolescents**  
2008 – Mopping up campaign of all adolescents all over the country ( National coverage 85%)
- **Mandatory vaccination of health care workers and all health sciences students**



# *Vaccination strategy beyond 2008*

- Vaccination free of charge of Roma population and MSM and other vulnerable groups near GP practices
- Mandatory vaccination of multiple blood transfusions and dialysis and before other important interventions.



# ***Documenting the change and the epidemic***

- **Seroprevalence studies in children, pregnant women, general population and health care workers**
- **Introduction of Hepatitis case based surveillance at main districts hospitals and Tirana University Hospital Center**
- **BioBSS in risk groups and general population**



# *Hepatitis C a new burden*

- Dramatic increase of Hepatitis C in risk groups
- Increase of Hepatitis C in general population (preliminary data 2.8 %)
- Establishing the chain of services and continuous treatment



# ***Hepatitis Action Plan and profiting from HIV action plan***

- Availability of rapid testing all over the country in main public health laboratories.
- Promotion of testing from Voluntary Counseling and Testing Centers established in all public health directories since 2010
- Testing campaigns
- Mandatory reporting of Hepatitis A, B,C,D,E from all facilities public and private



# *Hepatitis Action Plan and profiting from HIV action plan*

- Mandatory surveillance of polytransfusion and dialysis subjects
- Global fund initiative for HIV/AIDS ( 2006 – 2013) – MSM and IDU



## Other

- Improving blood safety
- Establish DDR program and methadone clinics in collaboration with civil society ( since 1996) and later with Ministry of Health and local government.
- Improving infection control in hospitals
- New guidelines and practices for sterilisation and dialysis units

Check up program ( 40 -65 years old)  
8521 with high ALT and AST. *Proposal to the*



## Other

- New guidelines and program for infectious agents screening of pregnant women ( HIV, Hepatitis B and C, Syphilis, Rubella)
- Check up program ( 40 -65 years old) 8521 with high ALT and AST. *Proposal to the government to include VH testing*
- New law on communicable diseases  
New case definitions and reporting system
  - Reporting of Viral Hepatitis cases
  - Reporting of HBsAg cases from each laboratory (public and private)
  - Reporting viral load



# *Other*

- Continuous introduction of different drugs into health insurance always for a certain number of people.



# ***Viral Hepatitis Strategic Plan***

- **A core group**
- **Situation analysis**
- **Preparation of the first draft**
- **Revision and discussion – round tables**
- **Approval by MoH**

