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GEORGIA

SUCCESS STORY

A Walk to Raise Awareness Saves Lives

Georgia's first walk for breast cancer raises awareness



Photo: John Snow International/Sara Barrett

Tamara Mosheshvili, a health advocate, educates young women on breast self-exams during the Walk to Save Lives in Kutaisi, Georgia.

Each year, nearly 3000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer in Georgia. USAID helped a local organization launch an awareness campaign to teach women that early detection can save their lives.

Telling Our Story
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For a rural Georgian woman with a family history of breast cancer, finding a lump in her breast three years ago was a terrifying experience. Since breast cancer in Georgia is usually identified and diagnosed at an advanced stage when it is too late to treat, the perception is that the disease is always terminal.

Because of her family history, Tamara Mosheshvili knew the importance of early detection, so she immediately saw a doctor. Yet this is not the norm here: most women in Georgia do not know they may save their own lives through early detection. Tamara's lump was removed and, luckily, was not cancerous.

Each year, nearly 3000 Georgian women are diagnosed with the disease. Typically, they have little or no information about the disease and how early detection increases survival rates.

A USAID-funded health project set out to educate Georgians — both men and women — about breast cancer. On September 24, 2005, Georgia's first Walk to Save Lives was held in Kutaisi, the country's second-largest city. Approximately 1000 participants walked through the center of Kutaisi to spread awareness about breast cancer screening and treatment. Dozens of volunteers registered participants and distributed brochures about breast health. Health advocates used models and diagrams to demonstrate how to perform self-examinations. Participants also received information about where to go for physicals with women's health specialists. Local officials invited women for free mammograms to the Kutaisi Women's Wellness Center, where USAID had donated modern mammography equipment.

Today, Tamara is a volunteer women's health advocate. She is committed to empowering Georgian women by teaching them about breast self-examinations and other methods of early detection such as mammography, so that they may increase their chances of survival.

"This is information that all women need. I wish my mother and aunts had been able to receive it," she said. "Now that women in Kutaisi know what to do and where to go for help, I think it will make a big difference in a lot of lives."