



TBILISI
MEDICAL
ACADEMY

COUNTRY

DOCTOR



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6

MESTIA

THE COUNTRY DOCTOR –
A LIGHTHOUSE OF LIFE

DIANA MAMULADZE

10

TCHUBERI

MEDICINE ON THE BLOCKED ROADS

DIANA MAMULADZE

14

BECHO

THE LOVING HAND OF A DOCTOR IN
THE MIDDLE OF THE MOUNTAINS

ANA GOGOLADZE

18

TSKHUMARI

THE DOCTORS AS HANDS
OF GOD ON EARTH

MARIAM BEKAURI

22

USAKHELO

THE SOUND OF HOPE
IN THE SILENCE OF “USAKHELO”

SOSO OBOLASHVILI

26

GHVIRISHI

WALKING HOPE

ANANO AKHOBADZE

30

PARTICIPANTS OF THE PROJECT





INSTITUTION

Contemporary universities and higher education institutions continuously strive to establish nurturing ecosystems for successive collaboration among diverse stakeholders. This in turn unites the actors from both public and private sectors, as well as citizens and communities which are facing different economic and social challenges. The higher educational institutions in their turn put in extensive to progressively expand their student's focus beyond the traditional academic scope and simultaneously create lifelong learning opportunities for adults and professionals.

The rapid pace of development and scientific innovation requires continuous transformation and adaptability. Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy (TMA) unarguably serves as an excellent example of this trend. Moreover, our institutional strategy and educational policies are fully aligned with international standards and the Bologna Process. We are committed to upholding the mission of TMA, which strives to deliver high-quality education and research whilst benefiting the future generations and the broader society.

This tradition in turn serves as an essential part of the multidimensional approach, which is commonly known as the “third mission” of modern universities — implying active engagement of the HEI in the public, economic, social and cultural development of the community. TMA remains devoted to core values, such as academic freedom and independence, and seeks to foster synergy between research and teaching, and cultivating an environment of open debate, dialogue and tolerance.

DEVELOPMENT AND DIVERSITY

Furthermore, as a student-centered higher education institution, Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy (TMA)

promotes development of independent and critical thinking, as well as scientific reasoning, through implementing evidence-based knowledge and research-oriented activities. These efforts in their turn ultimately aim to generate meaningful benefits for society.

We are firm believers that in an ever-changing world, which is molded by global challenges of ecologic, economic, and social nature, it is cardinal to maintain resilience and pursue continuous development, especially taking into account that digital transformation has already established itself as a central axis of the new millennium. Thus, sustainable development has become a key framework for implementation of the university mission statements – it is based on evidence-based knowledge and open public dialogue. The participation of universities in civic life is acquiring growing significance and subsequently reinforcing their role as supporters of a pluralistic and democratic society.

INSTITUTIONAL SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF TMA

TMA has initiated grant competition for student-led social and cultural projects, which serve to strengthen and expand the third mission among the students. The primary objective of this initiative is to support inter- and transdisciplinary approaches, in order to address complex challenges within the healthcare sector

As part of the 2024 competition call, five student projects have already been funded and are currently in the process of implementation. Each of these projects is fully aligned with both the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Strategic Development Plan of TMA. Currently, the process for selecting the new, winning projects of the 2025 cycle is underway.

LIST OF THE SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS IN THE GRANT COMPETITION:

1	The planetary health and waste management	Atuka Samadalashvili, Medea Kusiani
2	The Whisper of Danger: Study of the Influence of Decibels on the Heartbeat	Rishu Girish Shah, Tamar Dandurishvili
3	Special Needs Support	Tata Tatalashvili, Elene Sajaia, Sesili Lazaria, Ana Chikovani
4	Students for the Public Health	Mariam Jorbenadze, Nana Katchiuri, Mariam Kevkhishvili, Saba Chikobava, Elene Liluashvili, Elene Gubeladze
5	„VitalCare“	Nino Chkhutishvili, Levan Bakhtadze, Mariam Berdzenishvili, Lia Tevdoradze, Tamar Kobulashvili

TMA STUDENTS AND AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

The students of TMA express and cultivate their diverse academic and personal interests through establishing various dynamic clubs, each dedicated to distinct thematic direction. Through their initiative—and in strategic partnership with the collaborators of TMA are planned and implemented numerous high-impact awareness campaigns. These include internationally recognised initiatives such as Breast Cancer Awareness Month (“Pink October”), as well as programmes dedicated to Planetary Health, the promotion of healthy lifestyles, balanced nutrition, and the dissemination of knowledge surrounding a spectrum of medical conditions.

Beyond awareness initiatives, TMA students play an active and sustained role in various social engagement and volunteering initiatives. Each week, they visit the social enterprise Babale, where they cultivate meaningful connections with children living with Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities, which in turn promotes and supports their proactive inclusion and integration within the broader community.

Simultaneously, some of the students are actively involved in the Pink Space initiative, founded by breast cancer survivors, where they engage with the empowering personal narratives of women who have either triumphed over the illness or are currently navigating through its challenges. These encounters not only deepen students’ social awareness but also inspire collective dialogue and the co-creation of future strategies with community partners.

In addition to above-described experiences, the students of TMA regularly extend their outreach to care homes for the elderly and children, as well as to socially disadvantaged and homeless individuals, whom they support with essential supplies. Through these sustained efforts, TMA

students position themselves as transformative agents of change, fostering resilience, solidarity, and progress within society and serving as initiators of positive changes.

“SIX DAYS OF A COUNTRY DOCTOR”: A TRANSDISCIPLINARY LENS ON MEDICINE AND COMMUNITY

“Six Days of a Country Doctor” is one of TMA’s most ambitious transdisciplinary initiatives, which aims to raise awareness regarding the lives and daily activities of the physicians in the rural highland regions of Georgia and as an evocative photographic project celebrates their dedication while fostering professionalism among future doctors and stimulating their motivation to get employed in such regions after graduation.

Over three previous seasons, the project has brought together four regions, seventeen students, and countless untold stories. The first season of the project was held in Adjarian mountainous villages of Skhalt, Ghorjomi, and Khulo. During the second season, which was hosted by the stunning region of Guria, six students shadowed the country doctors, working in Chokhatauri, Kvabgha, Zemo Surebi, Satchamiaseri and Vanzomleti and documented their daily lives.

The final, third season of the project took place in enchanting Lechkhumi and Svaneti. The students travelled to the villages of Gvirishi, Tskhumari, Chuberi, Mestia, Usakhelo, and Becho. They captured the daily lives of local village doctors on film and then transferred them to paper and reflecting their resilience, service, and humanity. The readers will get to know their stories through this magazine.

Although the project has come to its logical conclusion, its impact remains uninterrupted through cooperation with the country doctors. Based on the findings of a survey, where they expressed a desire to learn English, TMA has provided online language courses. In addition, a skin cancer screening campaign was implemented in Khulo, which alongside the country doctors involved the academic staff and students of TMA.

Looking ahead, TMA plans to extend this collaboration with the country doctors by placing medical students for immersive, hands-on experience in the nation’s most underserved regions. These placements will in their turn not only enhance students’ clinical skills but deepen their understanding of the biopsychosocial context of health and strengthen their connection with the local community.

The language of art is one of the most powerful means of storytelling, which serves as an extraordinary platform for initiating positive change. Visual expressions create new perspectives and drive intense emotional connections.

The “Six Days with a Country Doctor” does more than document—it inspires, educates, and drives positive social transformation, which in turn fully aligns with the Mission statement of TMA and serves as an excellent example of commitment to institutional social responsibility and community impact.

MESTIA

DIANA MAMULADZE

THE COUNTRY DOCTOR – A LIGHTHOUSE OF LIFE

Instead of huge concrete constructions, in front of your eyes appear sky-high mountains, which convince you of your sentience, cut you off all sorts of thoughts and make you savour the magic of nature. It's hard to believe how perfect the synthesis is of the turquoise sky, which is proudly stretched above Svaneti. At night, the mysterious towers and the harsh, rugged mountains get tightly wrapped in the cape of mist.

The most important actors of this scene are the humans

of Svaneti. The people, who proudly carry the names, given by the mountains and Svan bloodline. In their gaze one can clearly read the culture and traditions of these people, as well as the see the enchanting force of the nature. In aggregate, it becomes evident that you are indeed in a magical part of the land.

Mestia is one of the most magnificent and breathtaking parts of the country, both with its nature, as well as its culture and the way people interact with each other.



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Mestia is one of the most magnificent and breathtaking parts of the country, both with its nature, as well as its culture and the way people interact with each other.

Nestled under the slopes of the Caucasus mountains, Mestia can be fairly considered as the actual heart of Svaneti. Here you will find a unique example of harmonic coexistence between indigenous locals, new residents, and guests.

Across the bridge in a five-minute walk from the municipality centre, is a small multi-profile clinic, which stands separated from other buildings. The equipment and staff at the departments is incomplete, however doesn't prevent them from using each available resource to receive a huge number of patients every day.

As soon as you enter the reception, you will be greeted by the personnel with pleasant smile on their faces. Here every one of them is eagerly going to answer your questions and make you feel that you are in a place, where your health actually matters. The team of doctors and nurses who work in this clinic give another meaning to the saying – **“the medical staff are heroes”**. Naturally, the main character of this story isn't an exception.

Shorena Ratiani is probably the most tireless person I have met during this adventure. Spending an hour with her is enough to realize that her work ethics, energy, and desire to help patients in any ways is truly unmatched.

These qualities make Shorena, as an employee and a person, the central backbone of the clinic. Like many representatives of her generation, Shorena received education in Russia, however decided to return to Georgia to continue her career. Her work experience is rather diverse and includes various medical facilities in Georgia, such as the David Gagua Clinic in Tbilisi and the Tsalka Hospital in Kvemo Kartli, where she also served as the guardian of the wellbeing for the local community.

When asked what made her to choose Svaneti from a number of potential job opportunities, Shorena replies that she can breathe only here. Hence, for six years already, she has served the local community with pride



and loyalty together with her friend, doctor Keto, with whom she has been friends since the first grade.

For her, being born and raised here, development of the region is of utmost desirability, so the local population can have access to the well-deserved, high quality medical services. She is convinced that one of the keys to achieving this objective is to attract local youth to the medical profession. Thus, she always advises



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youngsters to receive a medical education so they can serve the people of Svaneti in the future just like the way she chose to.

Just like any other doctor of the clinic, Dr. Shorena also combines multiple medical specialisations under her belt. At this point, she is a certified obstetrician-gynaecologist, family doctor, and member of the Mestia Emergency Medical Team.

One of the most amazing and unique qualities of this remarkable woman is the determination to do everything for the wellbeing of her patients. Her professional obligations are hardly limited to working as a doctor in three aforementioned different profiles. She often works shifts one after another for several days in a row without leaving the hospital, depending on the needs of the clinic.

Despite being an experienced professional, to this day she takes her patient's concerns and worries to heart without any hesitation and thoughtfully addresses even the smallest details, in order to create a sense of security and trust among them.

Being a doctor isn't an easy task by any means; however, the right tools and relevant conditions can provide significant aid and facilitate the processes. Unfortunately, these commodities happen to be unattainable luxury for Doctor Shorena. Currently in the Mestia clinic there is only one operating room, where all types of operations are being performed. Thus, even in case of great need, it becomes physically impossible to conduct several interventions simultaneously. The intensive care unit, which is designated for the patients with severe and chronic conditions is also limited to one ward only.

The hospital does not have a Doppler, which is an important tool in diagnosing many different diseases, and its absence makes the task for the doctors much more difficult. Throughout the year, you can hardly find here a traumatologist, since they come to the hospital during winter months only. Instead, the clinic has a doctor



named Shorena, who, if necessary, rides to the patients on horseback and assists women in labour without relying on the neonatal intensive care unit, since such unit simply doesn't exist in the clinic. She successfully copes with the difficult, emotional background and episodes of anxiety from the patients' relatives' side, often convincing them to make the right decisions that serve the best interests of the patient.

The blood bank of the Hospital, which is often needed, is not fully stocked and most often, has a few blood groups only available. This in turn makes it complicated for the local doctors to provide timely blood transfusions, especially when the circumstances are critical. In such cases, the dedication of the local doctors is truly heroic, as they selflessly donate their own blood for patients when necessary. Much alike to their colleagues, Dr. Shorena and her nurses have repeatedly donated their blood to wounded and injured patients, which makes them people who, in the literal sense of the word, save the patient lives at the cost of their own blood.

Shorena's professional duties remain to be present even in her personal space, since home another patient, in this case her own family member awaits. Even beyond that, Doctor Shorena always eagerly gives ev-

eryone the care, warmth, and love, characteristic to her profession, without any hesitation. As she says herself, she doesn't have any time for anything aside to being is the hospital, however, together with Keto she jokes about rare occasions, when she manages to rushes into the stall with the cattle. You probably already guessed that for Shorena, medicine is not just a profession, but a lifestyle that perfectly suits her tireless and obstinate character. Along with these qualities, she has an amazing talent to manage emotions of people around her and, if necessary, give them household advice, which is as important to them as water for those in the desert.

The experience of working with Dr. Shorena left me with emotions that will never leave my heart and mind. Despite the difficulties, the smile on her face and her exceptionally warm attitude towards her colleagues are undoubtedly a strong and unbroken chain that, believe me, would be forever imprinted in your memory.

The experience of working with her showed me what a doctor who loves his job should be like and taught me that the profession remains a profession even when we do not have the best conditions for it around us. As people working in the healthcare field, we must do everything for the well-being of patients, just as Dr. Shorena and her team do.

TCHUBERI

DIANA MAMULADZE

MEDICINE ON THE BLOCKED ROADS

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As soon as you arrive to Tchuberi, you will need to walk a few hundred meters and pass around ten stone-built houses before you reach the village centre.





If by any chance you decide to travel to Tchuberi, I promise, this will be one of the most captivating and unforgettable journeys that you can ever have in this part of the land. Our adventure to Tchuberi started from the centre of Mestia. The sky-high Svan towers were swiftly substituted with the road, fully covered with green forestry. Enormous number tunnels and the green mountains between them, proudly revealing their beauty are intertwined to create an enchanting synthesis. The alternating tunnels in their turn make you think that you're passing through some magic portal and soon you will appear in another universe. You need just a few hours to cover the distance, however the surrounding scenery and desire to memorize everything spell-binds you in a way that it's getting hard to get grip of the time.

This magnificent village, located in the valley of the Nenskra River, looks as if every detail has been painted by the hands of the best artists and preserved for centuries.

As soon as you arrive to Tchuberi, you will need to walk a few hundred meters and pass around ten stone-built houses before you reach the village centre. There right next to the grocery store you will see a two-story white building, which looks over the river across the road.

The building is surrounded by an old, rusty gate and a beautiful courtyard, where you can see an out of service ambulance car parked, which was probably manufactured several decades ago. This building is the outpatient clinic where Taso Devdariani, a remarkable doctor of this unique village, works.

The building includes a control centre for minor injuries, a dentist's office, and the main part of the outpatient clinic, where Dr. Taso receives her patients.

The Patients come to Doctor Taso not only from Tchuberi, but also from nearby villages, therefore on the second floor of the clinic you will find a room where Taso can stay in case if she has to stay late due to the large number of patients and is unable to return to Mestia at the end of the day.

Doctor Taso studied at the Medical Academy in the city of Chita, then returned to Georgia and continued her studies in Tbilisi. Her professional career in Svaneti included working as a pediatrician and neonatologist at four different locations, prior moving to the emergen-

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The common guests of the clinic are children, which evokes a feeling of nostalgia for the former paediatrician, who now works in a different specialty.



cy department, where she has remained for almost 20 years.

To this day, Dr. Taso recalls infant patients as some of the most difficult cases, particularly due to the lack of necessary resources during his pediatric career, which in turn made complicated to provide premature babies with necessary care neither in the hospital, nor in the outpatient clinic.

Today, Taso also provides medical consultations to the residents of Tchuberi. She is originally from Svaneti, despite being born and raised in Kutaisi. After graduating from the university, she developed desire to work in Svaneti alongside her uncle. Since then up to up to this day, fascinated by the community and the beauty of the place, Taso tirelessly serves the inhabitants of Svaneti and says that she has never regretted this decision.

One of the main difficulties while working in highland mountain regions is the malfunction of water and electricity lines. Another, not less of a problem is the periodical blocks on the roads. On frequent occasions, Doctor Taso was forced to turn around from the road to Tchuberi. There have been cases when she could return from Tchuberi to Mestia only at night. For Taso, being a good doctor means being able to find a solution, even when patients are left without water or electricity in the outpatient clinic. The number of grateful people clearly confirms that despite these difficulties, Dr. Taso has successfully managed to take outstanding care of her patients.

Taking into account above-described difficulties on the roads and the doctor's overwhelming workload, you wouldn't be surprised if I told you that she only manages to get to Tchuberi once or twice a week. Thus, during the days or weeks when she's not in the village, the members of her team led by the head nurse, Aza Jajvani, make sure to provide her with most accurate information about the patients. Aza has been working

at this clinic for ten years already and is Doctor Taso's main contact point with her patients. When Taso arrives at Tchuberi, Aza calls all the patients and informs them that they can now meet the doctor in person. In case if in-person visits are not feasible, she remotely sends the patients' information including their symptoms, test results, and all other significant details which the doctor may require. Thus, thanks to Aza, during our visit there, a line of patients was already lined up in the waiting room within minutes after Taso's arrival. The manner in which these people welcome the doctor is worth of separate acknowledgment. For them, it's kind of a celebration, as they try their best to show their respect and gratitude while greeting Dr. Taso, who goes to great lengths to care for them.

The common guests of the clinic are children, which evokes a feeling of nostalgia for the former paediatrician, who now works in a different specialty. This nostalgia however, has formed into a strength for Dr. Taso, since she comes from a family of doctors and has well-developed communication skills. Somehow, after a visit to Dr. Taso, even the fussiest kids are becoming most obedient, which in turn once again confirms above mentioned qualities of the doctor. The doctor's sincere smile is likewise responded by the patients with warmth and smile. Indeed, you can read in their eyes that they are not afraid to be here. On the contrary, they are even relaxed in the office of a trusted doctor.

In addition to receiving patients in the outpatient clinic, Dr. Taso, together with Aza, also visits patients at home. During our visit, we had a remarkable interaction with a 103-year-old resident of Tchuberi, who was suffering from multiple health issues. Throughout the consultation, communication was mostly in Svan language, so that everything would be better understood by both the patient and his children. If you had been there, you would not miss Dr. Taso's thoughtful, caring eyes, which I am sure serves as a special relief for patients. There is nothing more wonderful than knowing that a doctor is concerned about your condition and will do everything to help.

Doctor Taso happens to remember every smallest detail of her ambulance days with enviable accuracy. She keeps the history and diagnosis of her first patient still vividly in her mind. On the way from Mestia to Tchuberi, she would effortlessly recollect all the calls she had received from a specific location, whether it was a traffic accident or a cry for help from patients affected by a natural disaster. She says that while on duty in the ambulance, She receives at least twenty calls a day, which is quite an impressive number, considering that commuting around the region is often difficult.

Throughout her work, Doctor Taso has convinced numerous patients in the need for hospitalization and



transported them from the demote villages to Mestia, eventually saving their lives with this move. One of the remarkable cases, which doctor recollected was a patient, who was convinced that the symptoms were caused by food poisoning, hence was refusing to be transported to the hospital. However, after examining the patient's lungs, Dr. Taso came to a different diagnosis. Thanks to the timely and successful hospitalization, the patient escaped death from bilateral pulmonary thromboembolism.

In Tchuberi Doctor Taso is undoubtedly a person who is respected by everyone. Here, everyone knows her face, even though she is not a local and lives in Mestia. The locals truly appreciate her work and the efforts, which she takes in order to care for them from such a long distance. For Dr. Taso and her team this appreciation is the biggest reward of their profession and recognition of the services they provide, which they carry with themselves with pride and dignity.

BECHO

ANA GOGOLADZE

IN THE HEART OF THE MOUNTAINS - A DOCTOR'S LOVING TOUCH



I remember being nervous prior the departure, with most of it connected with the expectations and interest of seeing Svaneti for the first time. As we approached the destination, I became more and more excited about the wonders I yet had to discover. The landscape was changing at the speed of light. The road, disappearing among the jagged rocks seemed to go into infinity. Raindrops gently touched the window, and the waves of the mountains were temptingly inviting me. I was in an uplifted mood, and I felt like soon I would be waking up in a distant dream.

Upon arrival to Becho, the first thing I felt was the air



from the forest, infused with the thousands of scents. The secluded peace of the mountains was completing all of this into a harmonious union. In the centre of the visual field strong and majestic Svan towers alternate one another, each of which is centuries old. Each of them tells an ancient story about endurance, pride and struggle, where there is no room for defeat.

When you look around, it seems like Becho has been left behind in time. The anxiety that had caused worries before leaving the city had dissipated in an instance without a trace. Every step I took brought me closer to this fascinating world. The closer I got to the house of the country doctor, the more I felt excitement rooting in my heart.





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Our host in Svaneti was the family of Dr. Tina. The famous Svanetian hospitality in turn was creating an exceptional ambience.

The professional journey of Doctor Tina starts from her native Kakheti and stretches to the strict, yet magnificent nature of Svaneti. Tina is a strong, fearless woman, which handles all of presented challenges with pride and grace. There is simply no obstacle, which she won't be able to will not overturn, once it is concerning the wellbeing of her patients. Despite not being a Svani, she certainly has all the features, which are characteristics for the people of this region: strength of the character and honesty. She is distinguished by her professionalism, compassion and sincere care. Alongside medical treatment, her patients also receive tremendous warmth and support.

During the 90s she often was forced to work under rather harsh conditions, where she had to perform a huge range of interventions, starting with complicated labours, up to the suturing of a deep wound, often without necessary resources and anaesthetics. Back then she was the only hope and still remains to be the same, a professional doctor who sincerely cares for their patients.

Our host in Svaneti was the family of Dr. Tina. The famous Svanetian hospitality in turn was creating an exceptional ambience. Each of their word, gaze and action were filled with love. At night I was placed in a comfortable room to rest. The next morning, I woke up together with the first rays of the sun. From the window of my room, I saw how the nature was shifting the colours, - the mountains were slowly getting light up and the village was waking up. All of this was indicating one thing, that I would be visiting patients with Tina.

The first patient was Mrs. Zhuzhuna. Once she saw the doctor, she eagerly invited us in her home. She was frightened and concerned, since she was told by another physician that she might have had her heart stopped at any moment. The only hope for her was Dr. Tina.

The doctor started to examine the patient. At first, she checked the blood pressure and pulse, then enquired in detail the general condition of the patient and addressed with special attention how the patient was taking her medications. Then she explained the dosing and right timing of intake to the patient one more time. Together with physical condition, Tina also carefully observed patient's emotional state as well. At the end of the session, she addressed patient with a voice that expressed nothing but warmth: **“don't worry, I'm here**



to take care of you". We were already heading out to leave when the eyes of Zhuzhuna suddenly started to fill with tears and she burst into sobs. I was confused, didn't know what to do in such situations, however Doctor Tina immediately leaned towards the patient, embraced her and started to calm her down: **"I'm here by your side, don't worry"**.

The road towards our next patient was almost traced by the sun. In the patient's yard, the rays of the sun were aligning in columns of shadows and playfully shining on the flowers. The children were running cheerfully around the swing. The sounds of their chirping pleasantly alternated with each other. Tina was already examining the second patient.

The scene was amazing. Our patient, Mrs. Marina sat quietly in a hand-carved wooden chair, which probably was at least a century old, the doctor was carefully examining her postoperative stitches. The patient was fighting cancer, and had fully entrusted herself to Dr. Tina. **"I'm glad to see you so uplifted and fearless,"** said Tina after the examination. Marina's eyes filled with tears of gratitude, while Tina didn't spare for her a sea of compassionate words to encourage her: **"Praise the Lord that you are surrounded by the people who care for you and love you. You are an extraordinary, wonderful community"** – said Tina.

This scene made me drift into my thoughts, and suddenly I heard Tina's voice again: **"Life is full of surprises, no one knows what awaits us. The main thing is to never lose the will to fight."** Everything I have thought previously was getting affirmed by proof that the doctors should constantly seek the strength in their patients.

A wide path, embroidered with flowers was leading us into a large courtyard. Here, the third patient was waiting for us. Before we stepped into the courtyard, I was sure that I had already seen everything I could and that nothing would surprise me anymore. However, I appeared to be wrong. Doctor Tina, despite coming to visit one patient, carefully examined all the female members of the family and provided feedback with the best treatment advice.

The rays of sunshine kept following us through the day as the patients alternated one another. Each family we visited demonstrated a tradition of amazing hospitality. In this part of the country, the guest is truly the God. During the next visit to the patient, one interesting detail caught my attention, it was the Svan language. The Svans have both love and pride for their language, but if someone does not understand the language, they never speak it in their presence. The love for the Svan language was so contagious that I had a great desire to learn Svan language. With the help from Tina's daughter, I managed to learn a few phrases, such as "hello"



"how are you" and "I'm well". These small steps towards familiarising with the Svaneti culture turned out to be much valuable for me, since small gestures like these are strongly binding with the local traditions and people.

Most workdays for Dr. Tina aren't easy and often her work requires special attention. She overcomes any challenge with remarkable energy and confidence and provides her patients with necessary help. Her professionalism and love for her work are perfectly manifested in her sincere attitude towards her patients. Doctor Tina is an example not only for medical students, but for everyone else, who seeks success and personal development. She shows that professionalism and empathy are not mutually exclusive. Such approach to her work has resulted into wonderfully developed skill to alleviate the health of her patients, as well as to improve every stage of their lives. Tina is a symbol of professionalism, honesty, sincerity and empathy.

As the time of departure arrived, I felt how my heart seemed to be splitting in two. It was not easy to part with Tina and her family. The house was slowly disappearing from my sight, but the warmth I absorbed from Tina followed me to the end. The mountains of Svaneti and their magnificent scent were staying behind, while I was bringing with me the peace, simplicity, and sincere love from the people I found here. As I approached Tbilisi, I realized that this was the beginning of something new – of experiences and memories that will always pull me back to Svaneti.

TSKHUMARI

MARIAM BEKAURI

THE DOCTORS AS HANDS OF GOD ON EARTH

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Walking 25 kilometres from home to your workplace is the hardest. If you don't love your job, you can't do it.





Nestled in the heart of a forest near the Caucasus Mountains, the towering peaks of rugged looking mountains are guarding like soldiers the small Tskhumari community. The Svan towers, built of local stone, are a visual marvel as well as a symbol of spiritual strength and resilience. Behind these constructions lay an enormous cultural heritage and history.

The road to the village is dangerous, however the moment you see the ancient Svan towers and cobblestone-built houses, all of the fears and intensity of the road vanishes in an instant. Here, in perception you will get the feeling that the time has stopped. The mystical nature itself will tell you about the history of the village and its inhabitants, whose strict character organically blends with the local nature. The locals are warm and hospitable people. It is remarkable that to this day, they have preserved the unique Svan language, ancient culture and traditions created many centuries ago.

The winter in village of Tskhumari is usually very strict and is characterised by harsh climate. Sometimes, one may even be forced to travel on vintage sledges that have been kept away for centuries. The village doctors are the hope of the Tskhumari community, ensuring their not only physical health, but also psychological and emotional support. In this region, where access to healthcare is significantly limited, the purpose of medical personnel is even more important. Doctors have to combine not only one profession, but several activities at once.



For many years now, Svaneti has been heroically protected by one dedicated female doctor, wearing a white coat. Doctor Sveta has been the superhero for 19 years, fearlessly serving the six villages and 360 families of Tskhumari. She spends most of her days in the outpatient clinic.

My first introduction with Doctor Sveta took place in the outpatient clinic, which at that moment was overwhelmingly preoccupied with patients. From the very first minutes, Dr. Sveta eagerly shared her professional experiences with me. Together with her, I visited the Tskhumari community, where the main population is elderly. These people in reality appeared to be elderly by age only, since the fire of life and spirit was still flaming vividly in their hearts. In each family, we were received with great love and respect. The hosts greeted us at the door, smothered us in spark of their eyes and cordially invited to try traditional dishes. Once we would get ready to leave, they would say goodbye to us with a sad look in their eyes - **“Don’t go, please stay a little longer.”**

For the elderly living alone, a visit from the doctor serves as a source of happiness and joy. During the few days that we spent together, I realized that in the life of Dr. Sveta has seen many sleepless nights and lots of unspoken pain; has handled medicines in abundance and has lacked many. It was the woman in the white coat who turned out to be the one alleviating the sorrow, loneliness and sometimes hopelessness of the locals. She is indeed a distinguished woman not only by generosity, but her professionalism as well.

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the people, who can devote themselves the wellbeing of others do not exist on the fairy tales only. They are here and walk among us.

The doctor, full of care and compassion, has to walk in solitude several kilometres, at times in snow up to the waistline and freezing wind: “Walking 25 kilometres from home to your workplace is the hardest. If you don’t love your job, you can’t do it.” The sun hasn’t risen in the east, yet Dr. Sveta already eagerly answers her patients’ phone calls regardless the time.

It is simply impossible even for a foreign eye to go without noticing the warmth and effortless communication between the doctor and the inhabitants of Tskhumari. You will notice this during each visit every patient and you will get the feeling that she treats them as if they were her family members. This is an obvious proof of her sincere love of Dr. Sveta towards her people. **“Tskhumari is my family, this is my area of practice. Here people love you back because you take their story to heart. your eyes are not surprising anyone.”**

The doctor, who serves as the guardian of the village, knows the needs and challenges of each patient. She is driven by her patient’s gaze, filled with gratitude, the expectation that their healer will come again, open the door and, with a reassuring word, heal the patient before they even take their medicines.

If you’ll ask the inhabitants of Tskhumari, often Sveta can be seen walking around the villages in a white coat, with a stethoscope in her hand, carrying medicine and food. For Sveta, the role of a doctor is not limited to medical duties. After completing her professional duties, communication is shifted towards the rapport at the interpersonal level.

Many of us may wonder – whether it is worth for Dr. Sveta to work here, under such difficult, challenging conditions? However, her adamant love for the profession, deep sense of responsibility towards the people and devotion do not allow her, to give up. The main thing for this invincible woman is the well-being of her patients.

I think, the essential role of the physician exceeds the limits of medical service and treatment. The work of Dr. Sveta has convinced me that the people, who can devote their selves to the wellbeing of others do not exist on the fairy tales only. They are here and walk among us.



USAKHELO

SOSO OBOLASHVILI

THE SOUND OF HOPE IN THE SILENCE OF “USAKHELO”



Usakhelo (Unnamed; trans.) – is a small, cozy village under the thick covers of a forest, where somehow, the time has stopped for its illusion. Here, the life seems to flee in another time and universe; - of one where neither speed or noise exist. The architecture of the village is remarkable. Here you will see the houses with hand-carved delicate ornaments. Most of these houses are standing empty, however their beauty is still dazzling.

Apparently, the majority of youth has abandoned Usakhelo long time ago. The village today counts 140 komlis (houses; trans.) and the greater part of their inhabitants is elderly. Despite intense migration, those who have remained have retained their inherent traditions in the best possible ways. This is particularly true for the winery, which in turn has long established itself as an essential part of the culture and identity of





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Usakhelo is a significantly large village, which makes it challenging to reach each patient's home.



the village. In almost every yard you will see a Tsolikouri vineyard with generous clusters of grapes, and the host will definitely invite you to taste their homemade wine, made with their own hands. This is not only part of the village tradition, but also a symbol of an extraordinary welcome for guests. This unity determines their lifestyle and culture.

A little further from the village center, there is a one-story, incomplete secondary school which currently accommodates four pupils only. On the site of the school grounds, you'll notice a building that's hard to distinguish from average residential buildings of the village through its architectural style. Two rooms in this building are allocated to the municipality, and the other two are designated for newly renovated medical clinic shared by Neli, a nurse, and Tiniko, a doctor.

Tinatin Bedianashvili, or rather less formally for the inhabitants of the village – Doctor Tiniko is always distinguished with a bright smile on her face and sincere, attentive demeanor. Born and raised in Tbilisi, she received education at the Medical Institute (Currently Tbilisi State Medical University) where during her student days, she met her future husband, originally from Lechkhumi region. The couple had common desire and goal – to care for the health of the village inhabitants, thus approximately 7-8 years ago they returned to their ancestral home in Usakhelo.

Alongside her immediate professional obligations, Tinatini is actively involved in the daily routine of the village. While walking through the village, she is often stopped and asked for advice – whether related to the



health issues or other topics. Her simple yet reasonably reassuring answers are soothing and comforting to everyone. The locals speak of her with great respect and emphasize the doctor's special attention towards them and their concerns.

Usakhelo is a significantly large village, which in turn makes it challenging to reach each patient's home. This is particularly exacerbated by the poor and bumpy roads. Sometimes, if the patient lives far, Dr. William, Tiniko's husband and colleague serves as a driver and takes her to remote locations by the car. Similarly to Tiniko, he is also actively involved in patient care and treatment, which is unarguably very important for the locals and ensures that they receive the needed medical care on time.

Together with Dr. Tiniko we visited the first patients for the day – an elderly couple in their 90s. As it turned out, grandma* Vanda and her husband, who was a wheelchair-user have lost their only child years ago. Left alone to face of difficulties of the life, have found their hope in Doctor Tiniko. It was easy to see how much love Doctor Tiniko had for her professional work. She thoughtfully examined them and explained the effects of the prescribed medications in the smallest details. Her warm and caring manner of conversation was indeed a great comfort for the patients, awakening hope that they were not alone while facing their challenges. With eyes full of tears, the nan was blessing the doctor and her husband and spread gratitude towards them to the heavens: **“they are our hopes. Even if they weren't doctors, both wife and husband would still be able**

to heal with their words. Thanks to them we survived COVID-19. They would come to us even in the middle of the night and make sure we were all right”.

The patients were followed by another patients. The curiosity of meeting them helped to shorten the distance between the patients. We had vivid interest in each successive patient, we were wondering who would've been the next, what clinical condition would we see and what would be the relationship like between doctor and patient.

My six-day observation of Dr. Tiniko's everyday life highlighted additionally the importance of professional approach to the physical and emotional state of a patient. For Tiniko, no patient was a simple case. She interacted with them individually, with full responsibility and attention. While observing her, I came to awareness that being a good physician is not only expressed in knowledge and technical skills. First of all, it means empowering the patient, giving hope and, most importantly, never giving up.

During these days in Lechkumi, I witnessed many events, and all of this became a turning point for me as a future doctor. Working with Dr. Tiniko showed me that in our profession, we don't relieve people's physical pain only, but also turn into their life companions, provide emotional support and give hope, especially where they need it the most.

In our farewell conversation, Dr. Tiniko told me: “Our profession, medicine, is a field that essentially requires hope for its existence.” These words hit me particularly hard because they accurately reflected the essence of our purpose. Being a doctor means giving hope, standing by people, and helping them when they need it most. Although we will encounter many difficulties and challenges in this profession, our main goal should always remain the same - to spread hope and warmth.

* It is common in Georgia to address elderly persons in an informal way, such as grandma, grannie or nan – bebo, grandad or grandpa – babu, papa and indicates respect and warmth, as well as highlights age and hierarchy. (translator's note)



GHVIRISHI

ANANO AKHOBADZE

WALKING HOPE



The skills and qualities, such as responsibility, meaningful communication and orderliness help us to become professionals. When asked what makes one a professional, I received the answer in the village of Gvirishi in Lechkumi.

The village of Ghvirishi is divided into upper (Zeda) and lower (Kveda) territories. Kveda Ghvirishi is particularly remarkable with its loud and famous waterfall that falls in the Lajanuri Reservoir. The climate here is wonderful



during summer months, however the weather condition during winter period gets rather harsh. The locals have well-developed agriculture and they even grow various endemic Georgian varieties of wheat, among which Zanduri is the most exceptional. Even though the harvest may seem to be rather fruitful to a foreign eye, you will still see many houses closed. The migration of young people from the village is also high and those, who remain are putting extra efforts while trying to preserve the village customs. The hardworking and welcoming people of Gvirishi also have a special type of hospitality. Based on the emotions, which I gained from this experience, I can say for sure that here you can see the best reflection of the Georgian spirit, expressed in their hospitality.

The houses in the village are scattered far from each other, which serves as a kind of obstacle in terms of

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The climate here is wonderful during summer months, however the weather condition during winter period gets rather harsh



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Due to the harsh climate, Dr. Nargiza has to travel a difficult route to get to the patient and vice versa.



finding help upon necessity. It is overwhelming to imagine that an elderly person can be alone and has to rely on one's self throughout the day and night. Likewise, to other houses, the ambulatory clinic is also far away – located in Tsager-Gvirishi. In this reality, the main hope is the doctor of the village - Nargiza Mandaria, who, together with the nurses, visits the patient's homes to provide necessary help.

After graduating from Kakhiani Medical Academy, Dr. Nargiza started to work at the ambulatory clinic. At the same time, she was taking shifts at 112 (Public Safety Command Centre) emergency services and is licensed as a certified paediatrician. She can provide help to emergency patients as well as serves as a family doctor. Currently this superwoman works at three clinics and serves as the doctor for 4 villages: Gvirishi, Utskheri, Sanochi and Nasperi.

Due to the harsh climate, Dr. Nargiza has to travel a difficult route to get to the patient and vice versa. It takes about two hours to get medical help. At first glance, this seems easy to read, but in reality, it is rather difficult for the locals. It is remarkable, that despite the long journey, the doctor would walk into the yard of the patient's house full of courage and tirelessness and help them get to their room.

A typical day in the life of a country doctor was quite emotional. Every patient had their own story and after hearing them, it became rather difficult to accept this reality. The first patient was Tsisana, an elderly lady from the village of Zeda Gvirishi. She lived alone and despite her health problems, her wrinkled hands managed to maintain a perfectly manicured garden. Tsisana suffered from hypertension, struggled with walking, had to use a cane, and yet, she would greet the doctor in the yard. The moment she would see the doctor, her eyes, full of sadness and sorrow, would instantly ignite with spark of hope. Doctor Nargiza was not just a doctor. Being a doctor in the countryside meant being a protector, bearer of health, hope, and at the same time - peace of mind.

The next patient would await us in village of Nasperi. The road to the village was rather difficult, with the roads getting narrower and narrower. The patient was elderly and would require a routine checkup. The communication between doctor and patient didn't require any words and accordingly, you would clearly see gratitude in the patient's eyes.



The last patient at the end of the day was a mother of multiple children. Visiting them turned out to be the most emotional part of the whole day for me. The house was on the outskirts of the village, so far from other houses that you would reckon that no one else except the doctor would come, even as a guest. There was a sense of poverty in the house, but the appearance of the children in the lens left these feelings somewhere. Soon, the environment was filled with magic warmth and positivity. As the doctor began to consult the patient, the children stared at her with joy. Neither the nurse nor I could escape their watchful eyes. It was emotionally overwhelming to listen to this woman's story. With the children in her arms, she walked several kilometers to the outpatient clinic to give them a routine vaccination. Due to the distance and length of the road, she also was forced to carry food for the kids.

Such degree of care is indeed touching and something that one should always appreciate. Indeed, a "Super Mother", as I call her.

Dr. Nargiza served as some kind of a bridge between hope and sorrow for these people. After reflecting on all of this, I once again appreciated the doctor's profession. The moment, when the patient looks into a doctor's eyes and without any words reads **"you can trust me, I'm here to help"** is a piece of art in its own right.

Alongside the treatment regimens, medicine is strongly dependent on personal interactions. The experience, which I gained from doctor Nargiza clearly outlined the set of qualities, which are essential to communicate with the patient alongside to professionalism. In addition, the phenomenon of empathy and quick decision-making in complicated situations deserves an extra credit and appreciation.

Observing how the patients welcome the country doctors with hope served as an apparent answer to my question: what makes one a professional? A true professional is a doctor, who is always ready to serve their community, regardless of the environment and obstacles.



PARTICIPANTS OF THE PROJECT:



MARIAM MAMISASHVILI

With the help of the Country Doctor Project, my love for my profession has grown even more. I realized why I have to work harder to make the end sweeter. The doctor-patient's relationship, with exceptionally honest, genuine, empathetic and homely attitude was remarkable and appreciable. I would wish to have such remarkable and precious relationship with my patients in the future. Going through all the difficulties was worth everything that this project ultimately gave me, both in terms of personal development and professional growth.

NINO GAGUA

Participation in the Country Doctor Project became an unforgettable experience for me. Being part of the adventure alongside the doctors in the mountainous regions of Georgia for several days turned out to be very rewarding and fruitful for me. These days allowed me to get to know the selfless work of doctors, who work in the rural, remote areas. The project clearly highlighted for me the importance of proper communication and empathy between a doctor and a patient are.



ELENE GUBELADZE

This project gave me an incomparable opportunity to appreciate the role of a rural doctor in medicine. For six days I had a privilege to witness the difficult conditions in which doctors have to work, with insufficient equipment. This, in turn has further shown me how important and essentially needed it is for more doctors to be involved in such activities. I received from them a perfect example of empathy, love for their profession, and dedication.

NANUKA KATCHIURI

This project gave me an opportunity to see what it is like to receive and treat patients in an environment where comfort and modern technologies are not available. I also realized how important it is for us, as future doctors, to be involved in the medical development of high-mountain regions, as it allows us to cultivate essential qualities such as empathy, communication, and most importantly, love for our profession.



IRINKA ISIANI

Participating in this project was a transformative challenge for me. It reshaped my views on healthcare in general, human resilience, sustainability, community, and love for my profession. It taught me the all-important need for compassion and adaptability in medicine. It inspired me to approach challenges not only as obstacles, but as opportunities to make a new, meaningful impact.

MARIAM JORBENADZE

The trip to the highlands of Adjara was an emotional, spontaneous and diverse for me. I always knew why I wanted to be a doctor, but this project gave me a clearer understanding of the qualities a doctor should have in order to be a professional. In addition, I now have a better understanding of the many remaining problems and challenges in public healthcare and I think about what I can do to strengthen this field in the future.



LIKA KEKELIDZE

Being a doctor in the rural parts of the country is a journey that enriches not only medical skills, but also the heart and vision. Here, you realize that healthcare is built on trust, resilience, and human connection. Each encounter reminds us that treatment is not just about medicine, rather, it's an act of compassion, a bridge built for those who often feel neglected. These experiences humble and transform us, shaping a lifelong commitment to serve where the need is greatest.



SALOME MUQLADZE

The project "Six Days of a Country Doctor" was truly a special experience for me. Observing the daily life of a rural doctor and understanding the importance of their work allowed me to deepen my respect towards this profession. The project taught me how important is the role of a doctor in society, especially in an environment where each visit can be life-changing experience. This experience further strengthened my desire to help people in the future and make a difference in their lives through my work.

TAZO OKRUASHVILI

I expected this project to be full of diversity from the very first day of joining and present me with opportunities to have direct interaction with heroic doctors who spared no effort in supporting people in the countryside. This experience ignited a spark of motivation and determination in me- one that will continue to guide me throughout my career.

SABA ZAQRADZE

This project helped me realize that heroes exist not only in the movies and TV series, but also in places we may not even know about – dressed in white coats, working in the hardly accessible highland regions. Being a doctor is truly heroic, especially when you have to deal not only with symptoms and diagnoses, but also with the accompanying problems in a difficult mountainous environment.

LELA KORIALI

This photography project has truly exceeded all of my expectations. Everything I saw and experienced here, everything I became part of, gave me a whole new perspective on the subtle yet important details of the doctor-patient relationship. It took my motivation to a new level and filled me with enthusiasm to carry on with what I do, all the way to the end.

NINUTSI PANGANI

From fully equipped, high-tech clinics, to the p, with a stethoscope, guided by experience and instinct.

I think that witnessing this contrast in reality was the most important experience, which convinced and showed us that miracles are created not by technology, but by people. They are carved up there-the high altitudes of inaccessible mountains of Guria, on the way to the patient, by those dressed in the white coats.

DIANA MAMULADZE

"The Six Days of a Country Doctor" is a project, that taught me and allowed me to experience in firsthand- the true meaning behind the phrase "a doctor is a hero". It was a unique opportunity to acknowledge the role of the doctor in the places, where even the rays of the sun can hardly reach.

MARIAM BEKAURI

This is the project which made me fall in love with my future profession in a new way and allowed me to see the doctor-patient relationship from a different perspective- beyond the walls of the clinic.

ANANO AKHOBADZE

This project has been an excellent opportunity for me to develop a deeper respect for the doctors working in the rural regions of the country, those who, despite limited resources, do everything they can for their patients. This experience inspires me even more to contribute to medicine with the same dedication in the future.

SOSO OBOLASHVILI

Working on this project turned out to be even more interesting than I could have possibly expected. Interacting with country doctors and witnessing their daily activities firsthand, gave me a better understanding of the challenges I may face in the future and strengthened my desire to study medicine more thoroughly.

ANA GOGOLADZE

This expedition clearly revealed that a true physician is shaped by their selflessness, compassion and patience. The time spent on this project has become a source of inspiration for me. In the future, I wish to be a source of support and hope for those who need it most, even in the most difficult circumstances.





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