

# Pain & Policy Studies Group • International Pain Policy Fellowship



SERBIA

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For further information on Serbia:

<http://www.painpolicy.wisc.edu/country/profile/serbia>

## BACKGROUND:

At the beginning of Dr. Bosnjak's fellowship in 2006, Serbia was facing an acute shortage of oral morphine. Immediate-release morphine had never been available in the country, and disruptions in the importation process had cut off the supply of sustained-release morphine. Few of Serbia's medical professionals were trained or comfortable with pain management and using opioid medications. The national narcotics control policy was imbalanced, creating many obstacles to the adequate treatment of pain.

## FELLOWSHIP SUCCESSES:

Five years of advocacy efforts resulted in the improvement of opioid availability and medical use in the country. Immediate-release morphine was registered in August 2008, the first time in the country's history. Also in 2008, the MoH established a National Commission for Palliative Care (Commission) and appointed Dr. Bosnjak first as Vice President and later as President. The National Palliative Care Strategy (PC Strategy) the commission formulated recognizes that opioids are essential for pain relief and palliative care; that drug control policy must be balanced; and that the government needs to systematically examine and revise its laws and regulations to achieve that balance.

In 2009 the MoH began an analysis of the Law on Psychoactive Controlled Substances and invited the Commission to give its feedback on the first draft of the law. The Commission provided recommendations on how to amend the draft law in accordance with the PC Strategy and the United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. Ultimately, in 2011 the new Law was enacted including some of the Commission's proposed recommendations. From 2012-2014 Dr. Bosnjak participated in the Government Committee for Psychoactive Controlled Substances to monitor implementation of the new Law, including drafting new opioid regulations.

Throughout her Fellowship, Dr. Bosnjak was involved in numerous initiatives to raise awareness, change negative attitudes and increase knowledge of healthcare professionals, patients/ families as well as general public about the key role of opioids in cancer pain relief:

- the first textbook on pharmacotherapy of cancer pain was published in conjunction with the Serbian Medical Association
- Two educational brochures about opiophobia for healthcare professionals and patients were created and recognized by the MoH
- A series of cancer pain lectures were organized for the general public, accompanied by journal articles and posters, and
- Multiple forms of media were used to raise public awareness about the need for pain relief and the safe use of opioids.

## ONGOING PROGRESS:

Dr. Bosnjak has begun spreading her influence beyond Serbia with her involvement in two complementary international initiatives. In 2009, Serbia was included in the (ATOME) Project and the MoH appointed Dr. Bosnjak as a member of the Serbian ATOME team, which formulated a strategic plan to improve opioid availability for pain treatment and opioid dependence. The team developed recommendations for updating the opioid prescribing and dispensing regulations, which were adopted by the Commission and presented at the 2013 ATOME Serbia conference. Additionally, in 2012, Dr. Bosnjak was selected to participate in the Leadership Development Initiative program for emerging physician leaders from low- and middle-income countries around the world. Finally, in 2012, Dr. Bosnjak was invited to become a member of the PPSG's International Expert Collaboration and served as a mentor for the Cohort 3 fellow from Albania until 2014. In 2014, Dr. Bosnjak was invited to be a member of the Harvard Global Equity Initiative-Lancet Commission on Global Access to Pain Control and Palliative Care.

## CHALLENGES AND FUTURE NEEDS:

The new Law on Psychoactive Controlled Substances made progress in achieving balance and access. The next step is to implement the recommendations from the ATOME project and amend the current Regulation for Medicine Prescription and Distribution of 1994 (including amendments 1997 and 2002) and revise the regulations for prescribing and dispensing opioid medicines.

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