

October 16, 2008: I spent this day talking to the consul who acknowledged that his colleague misinterpreted my answer and being a diplomat produced an elaborate apologies. He explained that offices of Hinchey and Schumer were actually contacted by the legal counselor of my university who, as he said, did not have to rush. I called the president of my university, told her about my problems, my health situation that was misinterpreted in such a crucial time, inability to obtain medications, and was heard. I asked the president to contact Hillary Clinton's office and ask for help. She promised to instruct the university lawyer. Consequently I called the lady-counselor, she was abrasive and sounded very prejudiced against me; hesitantly she agreed to talk to me and promised to do something to help me under the "tight constraints she has".

I realized that I have to have my health assessed by respectable local physicians. Our consulate instructed me to address the SOS office that is regarded as the most advanced diagnostic facility in Astana. I was warned that it is "very expensive: only the entrance fee is \$500". My financial situation was disastrous; I made sure that my health insurance assured me that my medical expenses will be reimbursed and made an appointment in the SOS office.

October 17, 2008: In the SOS office I was met by a short skinny lady with sad but very intelligent eyes who introduced herself in quite decent English as Dr. Elena. Knowing how ungainly she looks, he assured me of her many years of experience that also included lecturing in a medical school. Her office had a modern computer and was copied after an American medical office that would be normally manned by a nurse. Even the garbage container had an English label. Dr. Elena, relieved that I could speak Russian, started asking questions about my health status and filling some forms. When my health problems were recorded, the next question was if I have enough cash to pay for medical treatment because the cost will be under a thousand US dollars. My credit card was immediately rejected, and Dr. Elena made at least half a dozen phone calls to her superiors to let me bring cash tomorrow. The answer was unambiguous: no money - no treatment. She was embarrassed but told me that she cannot disobey the order: every piece of instrumentation and materials – from a napkin to latex gloves must be accounted for and she cannot afford their super inflated costs to be subtracted from her \$500 per month salary. It was my turn to make half a dozen phone calls, finally, one of my Kazakhstani friends, a department chairman of system science at the local university, promised to bring to the office the money. Dr. Elena made another half a dozen calls that yielded the answer: do not do anything until cash will be in your hands. She blushed and spent one and a half hour talking to me about life in America that in her view was so materialistic that she would never imagine herself joining her brother who is living in America for seven years, but "is making sure that his daughter is brought up to be a really Russian girl". It looked like that I was the only patient scheduled at the SOS office for the first half of the day.

Finally cash arrived, and I was subjected to comprehensive and very thorough medical tests that were conducted personally by Dr. Elena. Actually, there was a nurse in the office, but she was a relative of the owner of SOS office and was overseeing Elena's work, perhaps making sure that she will not spend more napkins than necessary. The medical test supported my claims of poor health; even my only kidney was carefully counted. It took some time to analyze my list of medications, to translate my blood sugar count from Russian to American units, and finally, my complains, my medical history, test results and doctor's recommendations were typed in the computer in quite decent English, printed out and signed by Dr. Elena. The supervisory nurse walked in, gave me the bill, two or three times counted the money, then applied the office seal on the top of Elena's signature, and handed me the document. It had an important conclusion: "It is in the interest of the patient to return to his home country as soon as possible and be observed by his existing medical team". One hour later, our consul read the document and said: "OK, now I know what we will do". I still had no real medications and was feeling increasingly worse, but I had a hope that Kazakh government will receive the demands of the US consulate and will let me out. I was naïve.

October 18, 2008: Today it was announced that my trial is scheduled for October 28. This meant that since there is a 15 day waiting period after the trial, and trial may take more than one day, I will return home in the mid-November. Should the court decision be appealed, I may stay here indefinitely. My lawyer tried to reason with the judge about the trial date, but the answer was: we must schedule trials within a two-month period and we always do. I assumed that there was a call from the US consulate as well. Consequently the trial was rescheduled for 5 pm on October 21. It was a small victory.

October 19-20, 2008. I woke up late with a very bad headache and pain in my legs that were swollen below my knees. There was no sensitivity in my feet. I realized that my only kidney just went on strike. I called Dr. Elena and my son in Buffalo, NY, who immediately contacted my nephrologists, Dr. Khan of Vestal. Their response was unanimous: I must call ambulance and be taken to a hospital that is equipped to perform dialysis. Dr. Elena gave me the phone of a private ambulance, the only one that can take me to the President's hospital, "the only properly equipped facility with proper medical conditions". By mistake, I called the ambulance in Russian; the answer was highly abrasive: "Who the hell are you and why the hell are you calling here? Do you know that our visit costs \$200, and why the hell you think that you belong in the President's hospital?" I panicked and yelled back in English; they simply hanged up. Then I called Dr. Elena who made arrangements on my behalf, and in no time the ambulance arrived. The ambulance had two physicians on board: the Enthusiastic One who did not know what to do, and the Tired One who knew what to do. They spent in my apartment at least one hour taking my blood pressure and EKG several times with completely different results, checking my blood sugar five or six times and averaging the mutually-exclusive readings, and doing endless paperwork. Finally, the ambulance took me to the hospital.

The President's hospital was a warm, clean, empty and sleepy place. I was told that because of weekend there is nobody who can offer real help, but a good single room with a private bathroom is waiting for me, the bed is soft, the food is good, and I can always ring a bell for a nurse. With swollen legs and a terrible headache I got in bed and fall asleep. I woke up because of smell of food. The concept of "breakfast food" and "lunch food" is unknown in this part of the world; what I got reminded me food cooked by my grandmother fifty five years ago.

Two men walked in my room. The big one introduced himself as the therapy head of the hospital, professor and director of a research center. When I explained him that I am also a professor and director of a research center, he stopped being condescending and cracked a joke: "welcome to the President's hospital, which is as President's as everything else in this country". The second man, whom I initially assumed to be a KGB officer, happened to be a very good urologist, who took me to his office and did a very thorough ultrasonic examination of my kidney, explaining in real time every feature of the image on the screen. It was much more educational than anything I ever had in the US. It became very clear to me that the filtration ability of my kidney is next to nothing. Within the next 48 hours I received several medications, two of them into my bloodstream, and my kidney start working again providing plenty indication of its activity. My physicians agreed that the medications purchased for me locally are most likely counterfeited and offered me the real ones. The swellings on my legs were gone, the headache was gone, and in the morning of October 21 I left the hospital "against the medical advice" with the promise to return if my kidney will give me trouble again and with a three-day supply of the "real" medications. The two day treatment plus ambulance cost me \$500 – just the monthly income of Dr. Elena.

October 21, 2008. To be continued