

How Twinning Helped Transform Debre Berhan Referral Hospital into a National Model for Quality Care and Effective Management



The Debre Berhan / Elmhurst Hospital Center Partnership:
A Successful Model for Global Health and Development



Acknowledgements

The American International Health Alliance, Inc. (AIHA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization working to advance global health by helping countries with limited resources build sustainable institutional and human resource capacity. Through volunteer-driven twinning partnerships and other initiatives that mobilize communities to better address healthcare priorities while improving productivity and quality of care, AIHA provides technical assistance using the knowledge and skills of experienced health and allied professionals to strengthen overburdened health systems.

AIHA's mission is to advance global public health through volunteer-driven twinning partnerships that mobilize communities to better address ever-changing health system priorities while at the same time improving productivity and quality of care. Founded in 1992 by a consortium of American associations of healthcare providers and educators, AIHA establishes and manages twinning partnerships that link institutions with a significant amount of capacity in a target area with those in developing and transitioning nations around the globe that are looking to learn for that expertise. To date, AIHA has supported more than 170 partnerships

Since its inception, AIHA has operated with funding from the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR); the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the US Department of Health and Human Services; the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); the US Agency for International Development (USAID); the US Department of Defense (DOD); the US Library of Congress; the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; and other donors. With their support, our partnerships and programs represent one of the US health sector's most coordinated responses to global health concerns.

In late 2004, AIHA established the HRSA-funded HIV/AIDS Twinning Center Program to support PEPFAR objectives to build sustainable institutional and human resource capacity in target countries overseas. The Twinning Center focuses on strengthening national responses to HIV/AIDS through the creation and support of locally-driven, voluntary, peer-to-peer relationships between institutions that provide HIV-related treatment, care, support, and professional education services.

This booklet details the efforts of AIHA's partnership linking Debre Berhan Referral Hospital in Ethiopia with Elmhurst Hospital Center in New York City, which was funded by PEPFAR and CDC/Ethiopia from 2007 to 2014.

The contents are the responsibility of AIHA and do not necessarily reflect the views of PEPFAR, CDC, HRSA, or the United States Government.



Introduction

One of 17 government hospitals in Ethiopia's Amhara Region, Debre Berhan Referral Hospital provides comprehensive healthcare services to nearly 2.4 million people. Since it was established some 70 years ago, the hospital has continually strived to upgrade its services to keep up with newly emerging health challenges, as well as ever-changing medical practice and technology. Despite these efforts, however, Debre Berhan faces many challenges due to limited financial resources, a shortage of trained human resources for health, and its remote geographic setting, among other things.

Today, Debre Berhan Referral Hospital has emerged as one of the leading tertiary care facilities in Ethiopia and has become a model for positive change. Its remarkable transformation can be attributed to several factors, not the least of which is an ongoing institutional twinning partnership with Elmhurst Hospital Center in New York City.

According to many Debre Berhan staff, the close collaboration with their Elmhurst partners has resulted in systemic changes that have spread like wildfire from one department to the next until the positive effects have become clearly evident to caregivers and patients alike.

Ethiopia's Ministry of Health has recognized Debre Berhan Referral Hospital as the "best performing lead hospital in 2014" and the "best cluster hospital in 2014," providing several significant monetary awards for its outstanding service. The Ministry also honored Debre Berhan Nurse Matron Sister Tseganesh Biabil during its 16th Annual Review Meeting in October 2014 for her efforts to improve nursing practice and quality of care at the hospital.

Twinning is one of several key health system strengthening strategies adopted by PEPFAR. It is a unique development model that uses institution-to-institution partnerships and peer-to-peer relationships to benefit both sides. Twinning emphasizes professional exchanges and mentoring for highly effective information and knowledge transfer, while at the same time tapping into voluntary contributions of skills and expertise to effectively leverage resources. Twinning also develops inherently sustainable health system capacity because it encourages local ownership and synergy with host country goals for health system strengthening.



US partners from Elmhurst Hospital Center and their Ethiopian counterparts pose for a photo on Elmhurst Road during a professional exchange. Located in the heart of the Debre Berhan Referral Hospital's campus, the road was named in recognition of the lasting impact Elmhurst staff have had on both the hospital and the local community.



When AIHA selected Elmhurst Hospital Center in New York City to partner with Debre Berhan, the Ethiopian health and allied professionals gained access to the knowledge, skills, and best practices developed amassed over nearly 30 years through Elmhurst's successful multidisciplinary HIV treatment program.

Located in one of the most culturally diverse neighborhoods in the United States, Elmhurst is one of 11 New York City Municipal Hospitals run by the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation. Since 1985, Elmhurst's comprehensive HIV/AIDS services have included prevention and education; voluntary counseling and testing; medical and psychosocial care; and coordination of specialized care, such as substance abuse services and psychiatry. An overarching goal of the program is to ensure coordination and continuity of HIV-related care at all levels — inpatient and outpatient services, community- and faith-based services, and governmental and nongovernmental services. Elmhurst has been a HRSA Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program grantee since 1995.

Both partner institutions have worked together over the years to find solutions to many of the health service delivery challenges Debre Berhan Referral Hospital was facing, making sure that these solutions would be both technologically and economically sustainable. And, because twinning is a flexible and dynamic development model, partners have been able to focus on targeted reforms that would have the most impact on the hospital as a whole, such as HIV/AIDS treatment and care, nursing, and infection prevention.

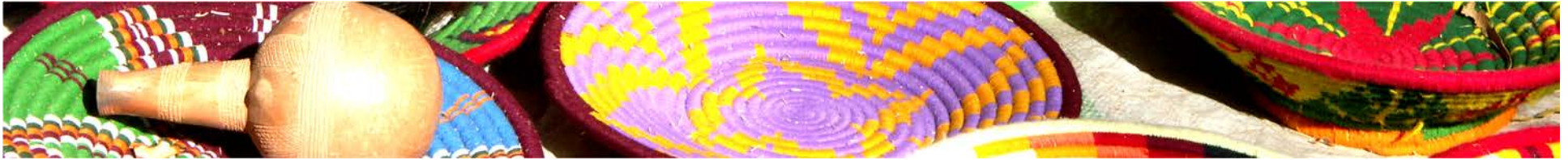
Partnership Fast Facts

Year Established:	2007
Year Graduated:	2014
Total USG Funding:	\$1,190,841
Total In-kind Funding:	\$2,081,449

Vision, Leadership, and Collaboration Help Debre Berhan Emerge as a Model Hospital in Ethiopia

As Medical Director at Debre Berhan Referral Hospital, Dr. Fiseha Tadesse is a warm, approachable individual with a clear passion for ensuring that the hospital successfully serves the community.

"When our twinning partnership was launched in 2007 and I visited Elmhurst Hospital Center for the first time, I realized that there were two possible scenarios for the future. Scenario one was for us to witness the high level of care provided at Elmhurst and believe that anything similar would simply be unattainable for Debre Berhan, which would lead to frustration and hopelessness," Dr. Fiseha recalls. "Under scenario two," he continues, "we would be inspired by Elmhurst's success and use that inspiration to redirect our resources and change our approaches to better serve our community. We chose scenario two," he says.



Reflecting on this choice seven years after that first professional exchange to New York, Dr. Fiseha understands full well the level of coordination and hard work it took for his staff — with help and technical support from their Elmhurst partners — to transform Debre Berhan into a benchmark hospital for all of Ethiopia.

Dr. Fiseha describes the positive changes that have taken place as a result of the twinning partnership with pride, noting, “We may not be able to replicate all of the latest technologies and procedures utilized at Elmhurst just yet, but we have been able to improve so many things that make a real difference for our patients and their families, as well as for our staff and theirs.”



For HIV and AIDS patients, this has meant marked improvements in the quality and scope of treatment and support they receive at Debre Berhan, according to Dr. Fiseha. “We saw first-hand at Elmhurst that HIV care is much more than treating symptoms with this drug or that. Our partners taught us about the importance of screening HIV/AIDS patients for conditions such as cervical cancer, eye disease, and psychological issues ... about the need for stronger counseling, patient education, and coordination of care, which are vital for improving quality of life and reducing early mortality,” he explains.

These lessons drawn from HIV-related treatment and care were readily applied to patients with other conditions, who have also benefited from increased education and counseling, Dr. Fiseha says, noting that patient engagement and satisfaction have both increased dramatically.

Infection control and prevention was another area that enjoyed remarkable improvements as a result of the partnership, Dr. Fiseha points out. “Really, I can say that these efforts transformed the environment both inside and outside of the wards. We worked with our Elmhurst partners to develop protocols and standards that pay close attention to the safety of our patients and our healthcare workers,” he explains, saying they added separate trash cans for solid, biological, and sharps disposal in the hospital and developed infection prevention guidelines tailored to the specific needs of each department.

Debre Berhan Referral Hospital Medical Director Dr. Fiseha Tadesse (right) conducts a tour of the hospital's Knowledge Management Center for Dr. Kebede Worku, State Minister of Ethiopia's Federal Ministry of Health (left), while Hospital Board Chairman and Chief Administrator of Amhara Zone Mr. Eshetu Assfaw and Debre Berhan Nurse Matron Sister Tseganesh Biabil look on.

Under Dr. Fiseha's leadership, Debre Berhan adopted a number of administrative and operational changes modeled after what they saw at Elmhurst, including nurse staffing and detailed job descriptions that clarified the roles and responsibilities of all employees.



"We also set up a workspace for medical equipment maintenance instead of continuing the wasteful practice of discarding items that required minimal repairs. These days, the hospital is saving money by investing in maintenance," he admits. "Other things, such as laundry and grounds-keeping services, we now outsource. This has helped improve the quality of clinical care at the hospital because staff have more time to dedicate to patients; at the same time, local small businesses are benefiting from increased work," Dr. Fiseha continues, noting, "We might not have fancy roads or signs within the hospital, but we have means to close pot holes and create inexpensive signs to direct patients to labs and other facilities within the hospital."

As Manager of the Debre Berhan Regional Health Department, Mr. Nega has had a bird's eye view of the hospital's exemplary rise to benchmark status and says he hopes that other area hospitals can learn from Debre Berhan and incorporate its best practices into their own structures.

"Community members used to complain about the lack of respectful and quality service at the hospital, but now the transformation is seen and felt not only at the community level, but also nationwide," Mr. Nega says.

"There were two other hospitals in the country that were benchmark hospitals for Ethiopia, but Debre Berhan has surpassed their performance and moved up to the number one spot in the country. It went from a hospital that no one had ever heard of to one that is winning national level awards. This hospital's performance gives us a pathway for future national-level reform efforts."

— *Dr. Kebede Worku, State Minister, Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Health.*

Dr. Kebede Worku, State Minister of Ministry of Health of Ethiopia, attests to that, stating, "There were two other hospitals in the country that were benchmark hospitals for Ethiopia, but Debre Berhan has surpassed their performance and moved up to the number one spot in the country. It went from a hospital that no one had ever heard of to one that is winning national level awards," Dr. Kebede says. Now, he explains, two other local hospitals are using Debre Berhan as a model to improve their own quality of service.

"This is something we are proud to see and we hope that Debre Berhan will soon become a full teaching hospital in the area once they've done some additional medical service training across all clinical care areas to strengthen teaching capacity," Dr. Kebede says, applauding the hospital's leadership and management. "They have really supported and anchored the healthcare workers, making them champions for patient care," he says, "and the results speak for themselves. This hospital's performance gives us a pathway for future national-level reform efforts."

After touring Debre Berhan Hospital and speaking with Dr. Fiseha, Sister Tseganesh, and other administrators and staff, Dr. Kebede says he drew one conclusion



“Staff spoke about both their regret for how things used to be done and their enthusiasm for changing that once they learned what could be from their Elmhurst partners. The result was an internal change in thinking ... a new culture of change, which in turn led to all the wonderful improvements we see, including Debre Berhan becoming the top hospital in the country.”

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Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Health.*

replicated at two other regional hospitals, that broadband service will soon be available to make distance learning feasible, that Debre Berhan will become a site for global health rotations and expanded clinical training ... ” The list seems endless, but for the unknown, small-town hospital that has emerged as the top hospital in the country and the team that got it there, these hopes are more likely a roadmap to the future.

from all he had learned: “Debre Berhan’s transformation is evidenced by many visible external changes, but the real changes are not external, they are internal. Staff spoke about both their regret for how things used to be done and their enthusiasm for changing that once they learned what could be from their Elmhurst partners. The result was an internal change in thinking ... a new culture of change, which in turn led to all the wonderful improvements we see, including Debre Berhan becoming the top hospital in the country.”

Dr. Fiseha reflects a similar observation, saying: “More important than all the other positive professional and institutional improvements that have resulted from our partnership with Elmhurst, is how our work together has brought about a shift in thinking both at the hospital and in the community. This sense of community and confidence in our abilities shines through in the performance of our staff and I am so grateful for the personal contributions that the Elmhurst team has provided to Debre Berhan,” he says, noting that he hopes that the personal and professional collaborations will continue long after PEPFAR funding concludes.

Thanks to the partnership, Dr. Fiseha says, “I have many hopes ... that client-centered services will become the norm at Debre Berhan, that several quality improvement projects currently in process will be completed, that the hospital’s success will be

Comprehensive Treatment, Counseling, and Support Improve HIV Care, Help Reduce Stigma

In 2007 when AIHA launched this twinning partnership, Debre Berhan was the only hospital in the North Shoa area providing antiretroviral therapy (ART).



Partnership activities expanded over the years to include collaborations between Debre Berhan Referral Hospital, Mehal Meda Hospital and Enat Hospital, and Debre Berhan University. As a result, ART uptake in the region has increased from 1,789 patients at one facility to 5,282 patients at Debre Berhan, four rural hospitals, and 86 area health centers.

At the onset of the partnership, one of the biggest challenges Debre Berhan faced was providing quality, comprehensive HIV/AIDS care and treatment to an increasing number of people living with HIV (PLHIV). The core ART team at that time consisted of three physicians, three nurses, three lab personnel, and 11 case managers — all with limited training in only very basic ART services.

Lack of current knowledge and clinical expertise transcended HIV-related care and treatment and had a negative impact on the overall quality of service provided, as well as both patient and staff satisfaction. On-site training and mentoring for Debre Berhan healthcare workers has therefore played a crucial role in the success of this partnership. In particular, the Elmhurst partners worked closely with their Ethiopian counterparts to improve medical and psychosocial care for PLHIV by:

- Adopting a multidisciplinary team approach to HIV treatment and care
- Enhancing HIV counseling and testing procedures
- Introducing pain as the “sixth vital sign” and integrating pain management and palliative care into overall treatment and care services
- Establishing consumer support groups and peer meetings at Debre Berhan
- Expanding home-based care

“When the partnership started seven years ago, the best treatment strategies and medicines were not readily available in Ethiopia, so a lot of what we did related to standardizing care, developing guidelines for changing treatment regimens, and other



“All HIV patients want to be treated with care and dignity. That is the way we provide service for them here at Debre Berhan Referral Hospital, and this service upgrade has everything to do with what we saw at Elmhurst Hospital Center.”

— *Debre Berhan Referral Hospital Nurse Sharew Engidasewu (pictured at right above in the baseball cap).*



activities to establish a framework for quality care,” according to Dr. Joseph Masci, Director of Medicine at Elmhurst Hospital Center. As access improved, Debre Berhan was well-equipped to ramp up HIV treatment and care services. “In recent years, the availability of testing kits has also expanded and Debre Berhan staff are now better able to routinely offer counseling and testing services to patients,” he says.

Integrating Psychosocial Support Services to Improve Adherence and Quality of Care

Even three decades after the HIV epidemic first emerged, the virus remains shrouded in mystery for many people the world over and Ethiopia is no exception. HIV-related stigma and discrimination still represent significant obstacles to people getting tested or treated. When Sharew Engidasewu, a nurse at Debre Berhan Referral Hospital, speaks about the complex matters of HIV/AIDS and its impact in his community, particularly in the days before the twinning partnership with Elmhurst was launched, his emotions run high. “The stigma surrounding the disease was high and care providers did not fully address the emotional as well as the physical ramifications of the illness,” he recalls, saying that the care provided to HIV/AIDS patients at that time was far from optimal.

“I was determined that upon my return from Elmhurst, I was going to help change the way HIV-related care was provided at Debre Berhan.”

*— Debre Berhan Referral Hospital Nurse
Sharew Engidasewu.*

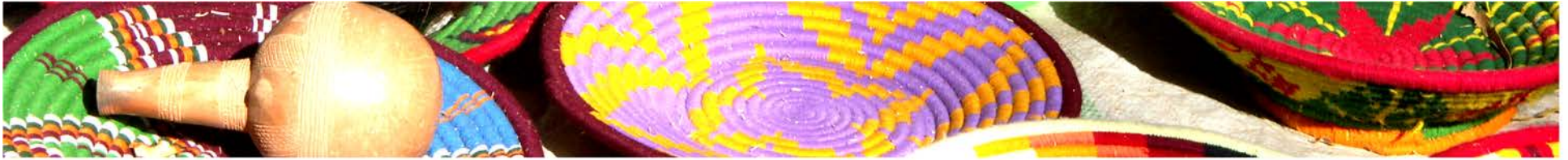
Recounting his first visit to Elmhurst for a professional exchange, Mr. Sharew says he was amazed to see the nurses chatting and dining with their HIV patients. “The Elmhurst nurses knew the science behind HIV/AIDS, including how the virus is transmitted, so they were not afraid to sit and dine with patients. Their humanitarianism and the respect they showed for their patients forever changed me,” he says.

During that exchange, Mr. Sharew received targeted training in HIV care and ART counseling, working side-by-side with the Elmhurst nurses and other healthcare professionals. Struck by the quality of care he witnessed first-hand, his own desire to improve the treatment and care services provided at Debre Berhan was ignited. “I was determined that upon my return I was going to help change the way HIV-related care was provided at Debre Berhan,” he says, explaining that he was particularly concerned with helping to erase the stigma surrounding the illness.

Over the past seven years, the partners have worked to upgrade and expand both the quality and scope of care and support provided to people living with HIV. Efforts to implement a multidisciplinary team

approach by including not only the hospital social workers, but also case managers and outreach workers who are employed by outside agencies yet supervised by AIDS Clinic staff, were ramped up.

In particular, Debre Berhan’s psychiatric nurse and social worker met with Elmhurst experts, who stressed the need to build greater professional rapport and



reinforce the importance of proactive consultation between the two departments. The ongoing training, mentoring, and exposure to best practices through professional exchanges has played a pivotal role in building the institutional and human resource capacity needed for Debre Berhan to provide comprehensive, client-centered HIV treatment, care, and support services.

The Elmhurst partners have also been working closely with Debre Berhan's Medical Director, stressing the importance of expanding the social work department to better ensure access to much-needed psychosocial services, such as palliative care and peer counseling that will help improve adherence to care.

"Prior to the twinning partnership, there was no real opportunity for Debre Berhan staff to provide their HIV patients with the kind of comprehensive psychosocial support they need," says Elmhurst Hospital Center Associate Director of Social Work Judi Brenner. "We really worked on integrating the training needed to accomplish this into our partnership strategy. We started with the HIV Clinic, but the concept soon spread to other units. It has improved care throughout the entire hospital, which in turn benefits their HIV patients who often seek other services," she explains.

Empowered by the knowledge and skills he acquired, Mr. Sharew soon became like a father figure to the people he called his "patients with broken spirits." Through a combination of clinical care and counseling, he was able to give hope to these patients, who often came to the hospital desperate or even suicidal.

He's quick to point out that one of his greatest joys is seeing patients who were deteriorating both physically and emotionally due to HIV restored to their normal weight and good spirits through high quality care, including ART, counseling, and nutritional supplements, such as Plumpy'nut, a ready-to-eat therapeutic food product.

Although Mr. Sharew has since moved on to a new position as TB coordinator at Debre Berhan Referral Hospital, the positive impact he has had on the people who still come there to receive HIV treatment is clearly visible as his former patients stop to greet him in the halls or elsewhere on the hospital's campus. He accepts their thanks and takes obvious pride in the role he played in mending their health as well as their spirits.

Speaking again of the dramatic improvements in the quality of HIV/AIDS treatment, care, and support that Debre Berhan Hospital has made since the twinning partnership began in 2007, Mr. Sharew says he's confident things will get even better in the coming years, particularly if the new generation of healthcare



As Debre Berhan Referral Hospital worked to improve care for PLHIV, the Elmhurst partners provided ongoing training and mentoring in specific aspects of HIV treatment, as well as in the multidisciplinary care team approach. Psychosocial care had previously been lacking, so Elmhurst social work experts conducted workshops on this critical element of HIV-related treatment and support.



professionals has the opportunity to see the exemplary care programs at Elmhurst and take part in training of trainers programs as he did.

"All HIV patients want to be treated with care and dignity," Mr. Engidasewu concludes. "That is the way we provide services here at Debre Berhan Hospital and this service upgrade has everything to do with what we saw at Elmhurst Hospital Center."

Strengthening Nursing Services and Administration to Improve Patient Care



Debre Berhan Nurse Matron Sister Tseganesh Biabil was honored by Ethiopia's Ministry of Health in October 2014 for her efforts to improve nursing care.

Although nurses the world over are frontline caregivers and the backbone of the healthcare system, in many developing countries the nursing profession is not always well respected or utilized to the best advantage. This is certainly true in Ethiopia, according to Ermias Abebe, a nurse in the Debre Berhan Referral Hospital emergency department. "There is a national problem when it comes to the nursing profession. We are looked down on as professionals," Mr. Ermias says, citing poor communication with physicians, low job satisfaction, and lack of substantial knowledge about the role of nurses in patient care as serious challenges.

Debre Berhan was not immune to these issues prior to their twinning partnership, admits Nurse Matron Sister Tseganesh Biabil. Recalling her first professional exchange to Elmhurst Hospital Center five years ago, she says that she was utterly amazed at the level of respect all healthcare providers — including physicians — had for the nurses there.

As she shadowed her US counterparts and received additional training and mentoring in nursing practice, Sister Tseganesh saw that the Elmhurst nurses put into action all the theories and clinical guidelines she had studied in books. Her amazement grew and she knew she wanted that level of professionalism, respect, and recognition for the nurses at Debre Berhan. She wanted it for all Ethiopian nurses.

"Here, so many of us knew things in theory and that was it. We blamed lack of materials and improper training and folded our hands ... it was an excuse not to give the best care that we could," Sister Tseganesh says, recalling that what she witnessed at Elmhurst spurred her into action. When she returned to Debre Berhan, she immediately began working with the hospital's administration to start making changes — changes that dramatically overhauled the roles and practices of nursing at the hospital.

Building nursing staff capacity to provide HIV treatment, care, and support posed its own set of challenges for the partnership, notes Jacqueline Stith, RN, Supervisor of Nursing at Elmhurst Hospital Center. "Lack of knowledge about HIV disease processes and the



provision of medical, palliative, and psychosocial support for patients was an issue for many of the nurses. Because Debre Berhan's nurses rotate through the various departments — including the HIV/AIDS Clinic — every six months, it became apparent that any training and mentoring related to ART and other aspects of care for PLHIV would need to be done for every nurse on staff," she says. "This was a constant theme throughout the partnership, with a lot of effort devoted to defining roles and responsibilities, teaching, and mentoring," she explains.

The lack of clearly defined roles for nurses was serious because it made standardization of nursing care impossible, Ms. Stith reports. "When we began to assess and evaluate nursing practice at Debre Berhan, we found there were many different levels of nurses, but there were no job descriptions that delineated their responsibilities and guided their work," she says. The partners collaborated to develop these based on the Elmhurst model.

Partners have also worked together to address other nursing practice and administration challenges at Debre Berhan Referral Hospital, tapping into Elmhurst's wealth of experience to adapt best practices to the local needs and context. Cross-cutting areas of focus included a broad range of targeted technical skills training, nursing leadership development, quality improvement, and nursing administration — all geared toward improving quality of patient care while at the same time elevating nursing as a vital and respected profession. In addition to sharing their knowledge and expertise, the Elmhurst nurses also shared their tools: process manuals, guidelines, check lists, and other practical resources that their Debre Berhan counterparts could adapt to the local context.



US twinning partners from Elmhurst Hospital Center with Debre Berhan staff and patients during a professional exchange in Ethiopia. Together, partners worked to make the HIV treatment, care, and support services provided at Debre Berhan Referral Hospital more comprehensive and client-centered. As a result, both quality of care and patient outcomes have vastly improved.

Changing Staffing Patterns to Improve Patient Care

When the partnership began, Debre Berhan nurses worked 16-hour shifts. Night shift nurses slept at the hospital, only waking to care for critical patients as needed. Some nurses neglected their duties and slept through their shift, which led to the removal of beds from the resting area, Mr. Abebe says.



At Elmhurst, Sister Tseganesh saw how effective the 8-hour shift model was for both the patients and the nurses themselves. Debre Berhan soon became the first hospital in the country to adopt this staffing pattern, implementing three 8-hour shifts that ensure 24-hour coverage for its patients. Nurses soon came to appreciate this method, which required that staff were available to care for patients throughout their shift. There was a corresponding increase in patient satisfaction with the care they were receiving across all shifts.

Because many of the nurses who worked the night shift commuted from distant towns, the hospital also began offering transportation support, which made it more convenient for some of these nurses to get to work. For other nurses, however, finding consistent, reliable transportation from remote rural areas has made working night shifts a challenge. Some have reverted to the 16-hour shift pattern for this and other reasons, but Debre Berhan's nursing leadership and administration are working together to find a way to make the 8-hour shifts work for the entire nursing staff.

Expanded Training along with Improved Communication and Operational Policies Help Nurses Gain New Pride in Their Profession

Many of Debre Berhan's nurses had long recognized that they were not reaching their full potential as professionals.

"Before the partnership began, nurses here did not wear their profession proudly," Sister Tseganesh admits, quick to point out how that has definitely changed because of their twinning partnership with Elmhurst Hospital Center. "I'd say that the relationship that has developed between the Debre Berhan and Elmhurst

nurses can best be described as a close friendship. We look at our Elmhurst partners as staff here," she says, explaining that in addition to the organizational change to an 8-hour shift, other key areas of improvement were in nursing leadership, professional skills development, and communication.

According to Sister Tseganesh, the twinning partnership has resulted in more hands-on clinical training for the Debre Berhan nurses. "We've also received new books, journals, and other informational and training resources

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— Dr. Tarekegn Ayalewu, General Surgeon, Debre Berhan Referral Hospital.



through the partnership," she explains, noting that the hospital has set up a small nursing skills lab based on one they saw at Elmhurst. "This ensures that nurses have a place to hone their clinical skills and learn new techniques," she continues.

Debre Berhan's Nurse Coordinator Metaferia Deresso wholeheartedly agrees that the peer-to-peer training and mentoring made possible through the twinning partnership was transformational — not only for those who had the opportunity to go to New York, but for virtually every member of the Debre Berhan Referral Hospital staff. "My exchange to Elmhurst gave me a chance to reflect on who I am as a professional, what my contributions are to the hospital and my community, and how I can be better," Mr. Metaferia says.



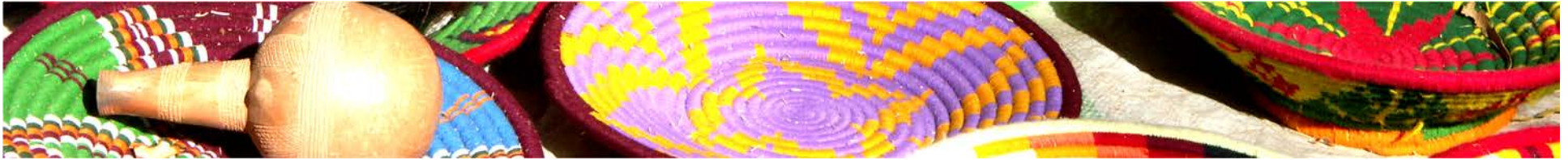
Elmhurst nurse Jacqueline Stith (left) shares a letter from one of her New York patients with a Debre Berhan patient as part of a pen pal program established through the partnership. This unique, client-centered way to provide psychosocial support to ART patients was just one of the many positive changes made through the partnership.

Dr. Tarekegn Ayalewu, a surgeon at Debre Berhan for more six years, is quick to point out how these changes in nursing care have had a tangible positive impact on the provision of healthcare services throughout the institution. "When I visited Elmhurst Hospital and saw how well-organized they were, how responsive and caring toward their patients, it made me ask myself what I have done for my own patients ... what we have done for our people," Dr. Tarekegn admits.

"As doctors, we do rounds and give orders, but it is the nurses who execute the orders and interact with patients many times each day," he says. "Elmhurst Hospital's excellence in nursing has had such a positive impact on Debre Berhan because the training, mentoring, and support from their peers has given our nurses the knowledge and confidence to carry out their duties in a professional manner. Our Elmhurst partners clearly demonstrated to us that improved nursing services result in improved patient outcomes."

Another type of training has focused on improving communication as a way to strengthen Debre Berhan's overall operations, as well as optimizing patient care. All levels of communication were targeted — including communication between nurses and physicians, between nurses and patients, and among nurses about patients. This was done through meticulous documentation of every action taken toward a patient and by creating a survey that allows patients to provide feedback about nursing services. As a result, Debre Berhan now staffs one nurse for every six patients to help ensure quality of care, as well as responsibility and accountability among the nursing team.

Mr. Metaferia says that experience-sharing around the hospital has spread the spirit of change from the nursing department to other areas. "Now you see the whole hospital lifted up because of the seed



that was planted in this department. Our hospital leaders and administrators welcome positive change and that explains the level of change that was welcomed.”

Although many positive changes have already taken place at Debre Berhan, there are still many areas that need improving, according to Mr. Metaferia. “I would like to improve the nursing skills lab set up at the hospital thanks to the partnership,” he explains. “This will help teach basic skills to new nurses and help our existing staff to strengthen and expand their practical skills. It will help us to sustain the changes that have been made and will serve as a model for other hospitals in the country to follow.”

Even nurses who did not travel to Elmhurst are quick to point out the fact that drastic changes have been happening over the past seven years since the twinning partnership began. “There is a contagious energy and drive to improve staff performance and the quality of the

services at the hospital,” Mr. Metaferia says, attributing the many concrete positive changes to the twinning partnership. Some of these include higher job satisfaction due to improved respect from hospital administrators and other healthcare workers; the adoption of evidence-based care, which has improved overall quality; improved documentation, labeling of fluids and medications for patients, and communication; integration of psycho-social care for patients, particularly those living with HIV or AIDS; and ongoing clinical training and performance feedback from both the Elmhurst partners and colleagues at Debre Berhan. “For the nursing staff, this has resulted in national recognition of the improvements we’ve made,” he stresses.

With more than 20 years of nursing experience under her belt, Woinshet Kebebde is eager to share her views on the hospital’s transformation. “Through this partnership, I learned a lot about the history of nursing; about Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, and how it all started. I came to realize that my profession is based on compassion and humanitarianism ... I would say that’s the most important thing I learned from the Elmhurst nurses because it has really inspired me,” Mrs. Kebebde affirms.

“I hope that the rights and responsibilities that come with nursing create awareness among young professionals, and I am sure that the clinical trainings, leadership, transparency, and communication among the nursing staff will improve care for patients and our job satisfaction,” she continues. “Moving forward, I would like to see all new employees trained on our policies and procedures and I would like to see all staff — both old and new — trained in compassionate care,” Mrs. Kebebde says, concluding, “We need to explore questions such as who are we serving and why to get to the bottom of why we do what we do and how to do it best.”

“There is a contagious energy and drive to improve staff performance and the quality of the services at the hospital. For the nursing staff, this has resulted in national recognition of the improvements we’ve made.”

— *Mr. Metaferia Deresso, Nurse, Debre Berhan Referral Hospital.*



Some Debre Berhan social services and nursing staff attended psychosocial care trainings conducted by experts from Addis Ababa University School of Social Work. These courses were developed through another AIHA twinning partnership. The trainees shared how the workshops helped them define key goals and objectives for future support services at the hospital with their US counterparts, discussing ways to expand community linkages to ensure psychosocial services are available to PLHIV and other vulnerable populations.



Collectively, all of the technical assistance, mentoring, and other support provided by the Elmhurst partners helped the Debre Berhan team realize that nurses interact the most with patients and are therefore integral to the hospital's success. "We know now that the care we provide is vital ... nurses are central to the wellbeing of our patients," Sister Tsegeanesh says. "We are proud of our profession and the services we provide and, because of this internal attitude and the practice changes that we've implemented here, our patients respect us more. We own our career and do not wait for physicians to respond to what we are trained to do. Now, we take charge!"

Strengthening Infection Prevention Protocols to Improve Patient Outcomes

Healthcare-associated infections are one of the primary causes of death and suffering in hospitalized patients throughout the world, so infection prevention is truly the cornerstone of patient safety. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the emergence of life-threatening infections such as severe acute respiratory



syndrome (SARS) and viral hemorrhagic fevers such as Ebola highlight the urgent need for efficient infection control practices. When it comes to infection prevention, however, there is a tremendous gap between knowledge and practice — particularly in limited-resource settings with devastating consequences.

To help bridge this gap, the Elmhurst and Debre Berhan partners worked together to ensure key personnel were trained in infection prevention standards and operations, says Debre Berhan's Senior Environmental Health Inspector Sister Abebech Zeleke. During a professional exchange trip to New York, she received targeted training in infection prevention and shadowed her Elmhurst counterparts to view the Hospital's policies and protocols in action.

"First-hand, I witnessed that there are so many possible ways of spreading infection ... healthcare providers and patients are exposed to potential contaminants each and every day," Sister Abebech stresses. "I learned so many lessons about infection prevention during this exchange and I was able to implement them at Debre Berhan," she says, noting that she began by implementing a baseline assessment, which revealed several gaps.

"Infection prevention is not easy, even in the United States where we have solid systems in place," admits Elmhurst Hospital Infection Control and Prevention Nurse Maureen Jones, RN. "Despite this, our partners were so willing to implement changes. They came on their professional exchanges with specific questions. They were often shy on the first day, but they opened up very quickly and asked to learn about more and more practices. Even if things were well beyond Debre Berhan's current capacity, they wanted to see what the future might hold for them," says Ms. Jones, who is also the US-based twinning partnership coordinator.

"Although I received my initial infection prevention training from JHPIEGO, it was what I learned at Elmhurst that really helped me to spearhead all these changes at Debre Berhan."

— *Sister Abebach Zeleke, Senior Environmental Health Inspector, Debre Berhan Referral Hospital.*

The Elmhurst team was always offering advice on how to adapt and modify their practices to meet the Ethiopian context rather than replicating it exactly, Ms. Jones explains, citing the use of sterile disposables in the United States as an example. "They can't purchase these supplies, but they can apply the same practices using different materials," she points out.

Partners established a 14-member Infection Prevention Committee at Debre Berhan and began developing infection prevention guidelines for every department, which have since been finalized in both Amharic and English. Sub-committees in different areas such as waste management, infrastructure, and maintenance were formed.

The Elmhurst partners provided training and mentoring for a group of Debre Berhan infection prevention master trainers who are now responsible for leading the hospital's ongoing efforts to prevent unnecessary healthcare-associated infections. They also helped set up a system of infection control rounds to all areas of the



hospital with specific Debre Berhan staff duplicating the Elmhurst model. The US partners provided follow-up training and mentoring for these individuals during professional exchanges.

To free up staff time to focus on providing high quality clinical care, Debre Berhan started outsourcing custodial, gardening, laundry, and security services. The hospital also provided training on standard infection prevention policies in every department and integrated a uniform infection prevention checklist into routine paperwork completed by physicians and other care providers during patient rounds. This checklist was used to provide feedback to the departments on how they were managing the disposal of sharps and other hazardous waste and track the improvements that were taking place onsite.

Underscoring the real and very practical value of longer term twinning as a highly effective model of technical assistance, Sister Abebech says, “Although I received my initial infection prevention training from JHPIEGO, it was what I learned at Elmhurst that really helped me to spearhead all these changes at Debre Berhan,” she admits. “Furthermore, the hospital and budget administrators who traveled to Elmhurst and saw how things operated there were willing to support these infection prevention endeavors because of the training they received there. At Debre Berhan, we started a hospital-wide ‘clean revolution’ where everyone, including administrators and physicians, took a day off to clean their office and practice area. This level of infection prevention awareness and effort resulted in a national spotlight being shone on Debre Berhan Hospital and we were recognized as having the best infection prevention standards in the country,” she explains proudly.

“We are not without challenges, though,” Mrs. Zeleke is quick to point out. “We still have water shortages in each examination room, as well as materials shortages here and there, but we are definitely on the path to providing better services,” she concludes, stressing the value of providing ongoing training of trainers related to infection prevention standards and teaching every new employee about their department’s infection prevention guidelines, documentation requirements, and rapid response protocols so they are ready to respond to outbreaks as a strong, cohesive team of professionals.

As Positive Changes Take Hold, Debre Berhan Initiates Push for Quality Improvement

Against the backdrop of remarkable changes for the better that started in the HIV Clinic and the nursing department and were spreading throughout the hospital, a new culture of quality soon emerged at Debre Berhan Referral Hospital. Staff there were eager to continue to improve and expand upon the strong foundation they had established together with their Elmhurst partners. This led them to develop and implement a quality improvement process to systematically review and revise their policies and actions to ensure measurable improvement in the healthcare services they provide to patients. To do this, though, they needed to understand their own delivery system and key processes.



“Elmhurst has a great background in continuous quality improvement,” Dr. Masci says, explaining, “As a team, we provided a direct orientation to principles and techniques for measuring quality improvement indicators and brought strategies for implementing quality improvement projects to the table during each exchange. We have been able to help them to quantify things, look for quality indicators, and make the necessary changes to improve based on our own framework.”

As Debre Berhan staff began to initiate the quality improvement process, they learned some surprising things. For example, they discovered that no instances of surgical site infection had been previously recorded because there was no active surveillance system in place. This meant that the surgical site was not observed, says General Surgeon Dr. Ayalewu Ayele. “Once baseline surveillance was implemented, the results showed a high number of surgical site infections. I presented these results to the hospital administrators and other stakeholders, who supported my vision on the need for hospital-wide quality improvement projects,” he says.

“I was also very disturbed by the high number of newborn deaths in the neonatology department and wondered how we could make changes that would improve the quality of care we offered to neonates,” he recalls. On his own, Dr. Ayalewu began studying quality improvement methodology then developed a 5-year plan to reduce neonatal deaths at Debre Berhan. “During the first year, my plan reduced the preventable death rate in the neonatology department from 36 percent to 15.9 percent. Sure, there are complex cases that require complex care,” he admits, “but I learned that very small things, such as having a heated room, will save a premature infant’s life.”

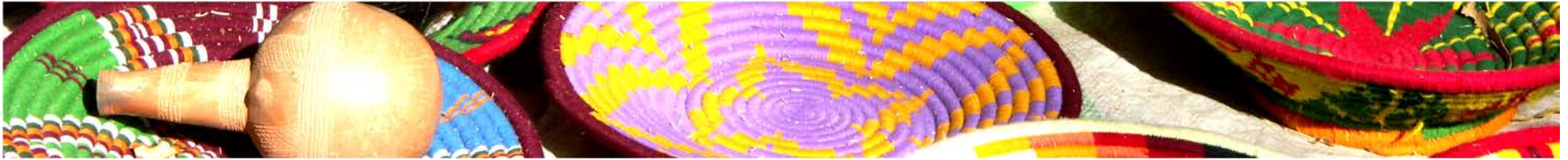
When Dr. Ayalewu had the opportunity to travel to New York on a professional exchange at Elmhurst Hospital, he was eager to learn everything he could about quality improvement. “Shadowing our partners and learning from them — all while observing quality improvement being implemented on a hospital-wide basis — really expanded my knowledge. I knew I wanted to use what I had learned to make things better at Debre Berhan,” he says.

When he returned to Ethiopia, Dr. Ayalewu spearheaded the initiation of a hospital-wide quality improvement project that focused on problem areas such as surgical waiting time and the prevention of healthcare-associated infections. The project necessitated closely examining many long-standing protocols and practices, which revealed gaps in both care and reporting.

Using the Ethiopian Hospital Reform Implementation Guideline (EHRIG), the Ministry of Health’s 36 indicators, and the regional health department’s six indicators

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— Dr. Ayalewu Ayele, General Surgeon,
Debre Berhan Referral Hospital.



as a guide, Dr. Ayalewu worked with his colleagues to design and implement a number of quality improvement projects at Debre Berhan. "Several successful projects are now being used as models for the rest of the country," he says. "I personally grew from the experience I had at Elmhurst, as well as through working with our American partners when they came here," Dr. Ayalewu continues, citing leadership, management, teamwork, organization, and the open sharing of knowledge, experience, and training materials as some of the most valuable lessons he has gleaned from the twinning partnership experience.

And, because the partnership with Elmhurst helped improve communication and cooperation among Debre Berhan's various departments, staff in the neonatology department began collaborating more closely with their counterparts in the hospital's obstetrics and gynecology department. This, coupled with ongoing training, mentoring, and communication from Elmhurst and support from AIHA, has further reduced preventable newborn deaths, Dr. Ayalewu is pleased to report. He says the changes that have been spreading throughout Debre Berhan Referral Hospital as a result of the PEPFAR-supported twinning partnership with Elmhurst have given him hope that even greater changes will take place.

"My passion is neonatology, of course, and I hope to one day have a state of the art unit that will help premature babies survive. Right now, we have just a single incubator and that is not enough," Dr. Ayalewu says, recounting a situation when three sets of twins needed care at the same time.

"I took one infant from each family and kept all three of them overnight in the one and only incubator, while the others stayed with their parents for

AIHA's Volunteer Healthcare Corps has placed two highly skilled long-term volunteers from Elmhurst Hospital Center at Debre Berhan as a way to supplement and provide ongoing support to the twinning partnership. Together, Dr. Aelaf Worku, a young Ethiopian physician in the Diaspora, and Neil Landreville, RN, an experienced HIV/AIDS nurse, have contributed a total of 663 in-kind days (the equivalent of over 33 work months) to strengthening Debre Berhan's institutional and human resource capacity.



Aelaf Worku



Neil Landreville



kangaroo ... I knew they needed more than body heat, but there was nothing more I could do," he says sadly. Overnight, those who stayed in the incubator survived and the others passed away.

With a strong focus on quality improvement; support from the Ministry of Health, PEPFAR, and CDC; and technical assistance from AIHA and our Elmhurst partners, Dr. Ayalewu says that he's hopeful that fewer infants will die from preventable conditions just because the hospital lacks equipment and supplies. "I think the transformation we've seen at Debre Berhan is outstanding in the context of our background," he concludes, "but we all know that we can go further."

The Power of Partnerships: Twinning as an Effective Model of Technical Assistance

If you ask staff from Debre Berhan Referral Hospital or Elmhurst Hospital Center what they think about twinning they might say that it helps them to understand the context and environment in which people work by direct observation and discussion, identify mutual goals based on real-life, on-the-ground analysis, and develop sustained interpersonal and professional relationships and break down barriers and defenses that may block achieving these goals. They might also explain that twinning is an extremely cost-effective and sustainable model of technical assistance — one that the Debre Berhan team has already replicated in their efforts to train staff at nearby rural hospitals in what has become a geometric progression of learning. From the personal accounts described in this booklet, it's clear that twinning gets results, but what may not be as clear is the profound impact that twinning has on the institutions and individuals alike, particularly on the US side.

Virtually every member of the Elmhurst staff who have been closely involved with the twinning partnership say they count this experience as one of the highlights of their professional careers, some of which have spanned 30 years or more.

From an institutional standpoint, it's important to note that the travel time for each US participant is credited as salaried official business by Mount Sinai School of Medicine and the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation (NYCHHC), so it's clear that these institutions value the experience twinning provides their employees. The value staff place on the twinning partnership was also clearly evident over the past seven years, according to nurse Maureen Jones. "As I worked in advance of the exchanges to pull schedules together for our Debre Berhan colleagues, they often represented different disciplines. Our staff was always so accommodating and eager to share their knowledge and time. I got to learn so much about other departments and care providers beyond the HIV Clinic, which really opened my eyes about everything that goes on here at Elmhurst," she says.

"The nature of the twinning model ... working so closely with our exact counterparts over several years and developing these long-term professional and personal relationships is something that is just not possible with any other form of technical assistance," says Dr. Masci. "There is a special value to this process where



colleagues can work and grow together. When we go over as a team, we get to see each other in a different light as we all respond to the challenges of working in the Ethiopian setting. It fosters a genuine camaraderie among the Elmhurst staff and gets us to look at our own work processes more critically,” he explains.

Dr. Fiseha, his counterpart at Debre Berhan, is quick to agree. “Although Elmhurst has much more advanced technologies and a well-organized system, we still share similar challenges, just at different levels, because the medical profession is the same no matter where we are. It is about providing quality patient care,” he says, noting that the partnership has helped them elevate that care across multiple departments and disciplines.

Against the backdrop of the US response to its first Ebola patients, Dr. Masci, who serves as an infectious disease consultant for the NYCHHC, cites another very tangible outcome of Elmhurst’s twinning partnership with Debre Berhan. “Although Ethiopia is in East Africa thousands of miles from the Ebola outbreaks in West Africa, the countries share similar medical infrastructures,” he points out. “My experience with Ethiopia’s health system has been very valuable in the discussions we’ve had about Ebola issues in New York.”

As the Debre Berhan / Elmhurst partnership graduates from AIHA’s HIV/AIDS Twinning Center Program, Ms. Jones says it is a bittersweet time for everyone on both sides. “Of course we are all so thrilled with what our Debre Berhan partners have accomplished. As a nurse, I am proud that the nursing staff has come so far and that the infection prevention efforts have become an integral part of the hospital’s operations,” she admits, “but we hate to stop now when there is still so much we can do together. I hope we’ll continue our collaboration well into the future.”



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— Dr. Joseph Masci, Medical Director, Elmhurst Hospital Center.

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