



JDC ETHIOPIA
SPINE PROGRAM
2023 REPORT





Dear friends and supporters:

I am happy to report that we're doing well in Ethiopia: we survived COVID, and despite political issues and local unrest, we continue our work. We still have displaced patients who cannot reach us, and at times we cannot travel to certain areas.

We have expanded, and continue evaluating patients, operating in 3 countries, and training Ethiopian health professionals.

Our outreach continues to amaze us. We typically hire a car and driver with a megaphone and large banner proclaiming "Spine doctor coming – free screening for 3 days." He will drive through the city for days, asking people to bring patients with "gubtet" or curved spines in the local language. Lemma, our multi-lingual nurse, has done this in Kembata language.

We are surprised to see pockets of diseases in different locales: Debre Berhan had 14 patients with ankylosing spondylitis and only rare TB, while Dilla was filled with TB spines.

As I write this, we are preparing an outreach in Gode in Somali region to train local doctors about spine deformities and evaluate patients.

More news:

- Working closely with the Ethiopian Ministry of Health, we have been allocated space at St. Paul Hospital, a major Addis Ababa Hospital system, for a freestanding spine center with clinic space, operating rooms, and physical therapy. X-ray, CT, and MRI are on the same campus. This is a major step towards self-sufficiency. A key goal for the coming year is to raise funds for renovation and equipment needed to establish the National Spine Center.
- We are assisting CURE, a Christian orthopedic hospital in Addis Ababa, to start a pediatric spine program. This will increase local spine capacity.

We are making significant progress in training local surgeons and other health professionals to ensure the success of the National Spine Center:

- Dr. Eskinder, our orthopedic surgeon, has departed to GANGA Hospital in Coimbatore, India for a full-time spine fellowship training.
- We sent 8 patients to Ghana for traction and surgery, as well as 2 nurses for training. We have also sent 20 patients to India for surgery, along with 8 doctors and nurses for training; this is part of anew partnership with Ganga Hospital in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.
- Dr. Serena Hu, Chair of Spine at Stanford, and Dr. Ted Belanger, spine surgeon in Dallas, operated at the Korean Hospital for 2 weeks, doing 24 surgeries.
- Dr. Abraham Tadele, our neurosurgeon, has operated on 6 cases as well.
- In all, we've operated on 46 out of 64 patients inside Ethiopia so far this year.
- Our partners from FOCOS in Ghana visited, evaluated hundreds of patients, and lengthened growing rods and maintained others.
- We are well-positioned for 2024, and are planning more trainings throughout Ethiopia as well as surgeries in Ethiopia, Ghana, and India.

We would like to ask you to consider increasing your support, to assist with the renovations and establishment of the National Spine Center.

I am available for zoom calls or conferences.

With thanks,

Rick Hodes, MD, MACP
Medical Director, JDC-Ethiopia



THE NEED

Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa, with 126 million people. There is a high rate of spinal deformity caused by scoliosis, tuberculosis, old polio, and neurofibromatosis, as well as degenerative disease and trauma. There could be over 50,000 Ethiopians in need of spine surgery, highlighting the gap between need and availability of care. JDC is the only organization working in this area in the entire country. Before we began in 2006, there was zero spine care!

OUR IMPACT IN 2023

As of October 30, 2023:



3,791

patients screened in 5 Cities



541

New patients



64

Surgeries



161

Educated Health Professionals



JDC is thrilled to announce the fellowship of Dr. Eskinder Kebede at Ganga Hospital in India for one year. Dr. Eskinder will return to Ethiopia to contribute to the national spine program. Assisting over 200 spine surgeries to date, he is receiving comprehensive training in all facets of spine care from some of the world's top surgeons.

A high level delegation of four Ministry of Health officials visited Ganga hospital to review our program. They met patients in all stages of treatment, observed surgeries, and discussed training with Prof Rajasekaran. They concluded: *"This is a great opportunity for our country. Our patients are getting excellent care and our surgeons are being well-trained."*

Dr. Theodore Belanger from Texas Back Institute and Dr. Serena Hu, chair of spine at Stanford University in Palo Alto operated on 24 Ethiopian patients. They were assisted by numerous Ethiopian surgeons who were grateful to train with these experts.



MINISTRY OF HEALTH-ETHIOPIA

State Minister Dr. Ayele Teshome officially recognized Dr. Rick for his unwavering dedication and life-saving efforts spanning over three decades, during a ceremony held at the Ministry of Health Office.



SCHOOL SCREENING

Coordinated with World Spine Day, October 16, 2023, the JDC Spine Program, in collaboration with the Ethiopian Ministry of Health, Addis Ababa Health and Education Bureaus, conducted the capital's first school screening for scoliosis. We successfully screened 1,349 students, and found a deformity rate of 2.15%.



THE GEBEYEHU SISTERS



Betemariam, Nazrawit, and Samrawit faced a childhood filled with pain and stigma due to their spine deformities. The heartache they experienced made school all the more difficult. Despite this, their unbreakable bond as sisters became a source of strength.

Nazrawit was referred to us in 2016 at age 10. She reported that she also has two sisters with scoliosis. Nazrawit underwent three months of traction in Ghana, followed by corrective surgery with 3-rods and 16-screws. Recently, we sent her two sisters to Ganga hospital in Tamil Nadu, India where they had six-weeks of traction, followed by successful surgery.

Betemariam is inspired by her mother's cloth weaving and aspires to become a designer, to showcase Ethiopian textiles to the world. Samrawit, deeply passionate about music, spends hours composing songs reflecting her journey and aspirations. And Nazrawit? She wants to become Prime Minister of Ethiopia!



Nazrawit - Before



Nazrawit - After



Samrawit - Before



Samrawit - After



Betemariam - Before



Betemariam - After



In March 2023, we signed a memorandum of understanding with Professor Rajasekaran Shanmuganathan of Ganga Hospital in Coimbatore, India to operate on Ethiopian patients and train Ethiopian surgeons.

Drs. Tewodros Asegie and Biniam Gebre-Egzabher attended a two-week training at Ganga. They reported: *“We are seeing cases in a day at Ganga that we see in a month in Ethiopia. The level of professional care and techniques are quite incredible.”*

In June 2023, we sent our first 5 patients to Ganga, along with two doctors for short-term training. Upon arrival, the patients were welcomed, evaluated, and specialized menus setup. After assessment by the senior surgeon, each patient was given a surgical timeline. Patients reported: *“We have never been treated like this in the past – the medical care is amazing, and the doctors and nurses are so kind to us.”*

Recently, we got 26 applications for 2 yearlong spine fellowship spots at Ganga hospital, indicating the great interest in spine among Ethiopian physicians.





WHAT'S NEXT?

The National Spine Center in Ethiopia!

Our major goal for the coming years is to build spine care in Ethiopia. This includes a physical center, as well as training doctors and medical staff.

In October 2023, the Ethiopian Ministry of Health designated an empty building on the grounds of St. Paul's Hospital to be The National Spine Center. The building is structurally sound, but needs significant renovation to create clinic space, operating rooms, and physical therapy facilities.

Please consider joining us to make this a reality. We are actively fundraising for renovation costs, as well as equipment for spine care and rehabilitation, training, and research.

The Ministry recognizes the pressing need for comprehensive spine care and has acknowledged JDC's longstanding commitment to enhancing the lives of spine patients.

In early November, we met with Dr. Elubabor Buno, the Medical Services Director of the Ministry of Health. He commented: "Before JDC started, there was zero spine care in Ethiopia. And zero interest."

Please join us in turning this vision into reality. Your partnership will make a significant difference.

OUR COMMITMENT

Over the past 17-years, Dr. Rick Hodes and the JDC spine team have evaluated and treated over 5,500 Ethiopians. We have performed over 1500 surgeries! No patient is ever charged. The impact of the JDC Spine Program on patients' lives is life-changing, not only for our patients, but also for their families and communities.

A child who undergoes surgery regains health, lung capacity, and self-confidence. With your support, we can continue helping patients achieve a chance for a better life.

ABOUT JDC



JDC is the world's leading Jewish humanitarian assistance organization, impacting millions of lives in more than 70 countries. JDC leverages a century of experience confronting poverty and crisis around the world to make the world a better place for all. Our work in Ethiopia is completely non-sectarian.

Learn more about JDC at www.jdc.org

Learn more about Dr. Rick Hodes at www.RickHodes.org

Gifts are tax-deductible. Contact us about wire transfers, planned giving, bequests, stock transfer and corporate matching gifts.

JDC is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization for tax purposes.

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Must be marked "Ethiopia Medical" to get to us.

