



### A woman in rural Ethiopia

faces many adversities, the most challenging of which is childbirth. Ethiopia ranks among six countries in the world with the highest maternal mortality. This is primarily due to lack of access to obstetric care and lack of transportation and medical resources.

Devastating consequences of prolonged labor include obstetric fistula (a hole in the bladder or rectum that communicates with the vagina leading to continuous incontinence) and uterovaginal prolapse (protrusion of the uterus and vagina outside the body). These conditions compromise a woman's ability to perform basic bodily functions such as emptying her bladder or bowel or have intimate relationship.

Footsteps to Healing is a collaborative project between OHSU and Gimbie Adventist Hospital in Ethiopia created to address these health concerns. We provide free pelvic floor surgery to rural Ethiopian women and training of local health care providers to build a sustainable local capacity. In so doing, our OHSU healthcare providers including physicians in training (residents) who participate have life altering experiences that make them better healthcare providers for patients at home.



### Team reflections

In April 2012 and 2013, a team of 11 health care providers traveled to Gimbie to perform over 85 uterovaginal prolapse surgeries. Our team members share their experiences:

Gina Westoff, MD: *"As I am now finishing my residency, I know this experience not only improved my skills, but it has shaped me as a surgeon."*

Rebecca Cooper, RN: *"One of the most rewarding experiences for me was spending time with the women before surgery, getting them showered and dressed. Helping these nervous, quiet, beautiful women bathe was an honor. I was amazed that the shared experiences of women worldwide still allowed us to communicate, despite not having a translator available in the shower."*



Kerrie Adams, MD: *"I went on the trip expecting to give to others, I wasn't prepared for how much the patients and staff at Gimbie Adventist Hospital (GAH) would give to me."*

April Duong, RN *"The trip gave me a chance to see the incredible country of Ethiopia while helping our cherished "sisters" with their prolapse conditions. Although there was a language barrier at times, our surgical team saw our patient's gratefulness in their beautiful faces and eyes."*

Dana Peterson, RN *"Their smiles are so beautiful and they just light up after they have had their surgeries. Soon thereafter they start the long walk back home with their family members who have been providing the personal care before and after the surgeries. I am humbled by their inner strength"*



## Our patients



At 18 years old, she was our youngest patient. She traveled to Gimbie after hearing on the radio about our prolapse team. Her journey took her 5 hours by bus and 6 hours walking.

She explained that when she was 10 years old she developed prolapse; she had never had children and was unmarried. Her age, lack of children, and her story were atypical for uterine prolapse; however, she was coping with the largest uterine prolapse the team had seen. Her prolapse was so large that it was difficult to work and extremely uncomfortable to sit. She recovered well from a long and difficult surgery and was grateful for the relief from her prolapse.



## Students play a key role

OHSU medical and public health students Erin Fennern and Jennifer Jacobs spent their summer in 2012 with GAH nursing and midwifery students doing outreach community research on maternal and reproductive health topics. They were selected to present their work at the Yale annual Unite for Sight Global Health Conference.



She had spent the greater part of her life suffering from uterine prolapse. When she arrived she waited in line for 2 days to be evaluated for surgery. She was a tiny woman with a huge smile. During rounds she would warmly hold on to our hands in a gesture of gratitude.



She was 6 months postpartum from the delivery of her 6<sup>th</sup> child. She heard about the prolapse team at her church in a nearby town. She spends her days caring for her children, gathering wood, and collecting water for her family. The discomfort from her prolapse was hindering her ability to work and care for her family. Like many of our patients, she hesitated to smile during photos. However, when she smiled, she lit up the room.

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks to **Deneke's Hope Foundation** who provided \$5000 used to cover the cost of 30 surgeries this April 2013.

[www.deneke'shopefoundation.com](http://www.deneke'shopefoundation.com)

## MOTHER'S DAY DEDICATION

This mother's day, we invite our supporters to donate to this cause and dedicate your donation to your loved ones. We will send a beautiful Footsteps to Healing Holiday card for any donation above \$50.00. By donating \$175, you can cover the cost of one pelvic surgery for a woman thus drastically improving her life.

Your tax deductible donation can be made to the global OHSU Foundation/ Global women's health initiatives through our website link at

[www.ohsuwomenshealth.com/global](http://www.ohsuwomenshealth.com/global).

Please make sure you enter your dedication on the donation link. The first 15 donors who give \$200.00 or more will receive one lb of coffee grown and roasted by women in Gimbie!

Thank you for your continued support of our project. For more information, contact project lead Dr. Nardos at

[rahel.nardos@gmail.com](mailto:rahel.nardos@gmail.com)



## Kind hearted donations

We are grateful for the surgical supply donations from **Boston Scientific**, **American Medical Systems**, **Ethicon**, and **Covidien**. These donations were vital to the success of our April 2012 and April 2013 trips to Gimbie.

A special thank you to **Lois Robinson** and family & friends, **Abbey Gregory**, and **Betsy Winslow** for hand making the beautiful dresses we gave to each woman after surgery.

We are also grateful for the support from the **Circle of Giving** women who generously sponsored multiple surgeries.