

VHC Volunteer Helps Strengthen Pre-service Medical Education in Ethiopia



"When you live abroad, you tend to complain a lot about Africa, but I didn't want to be negative and passive. I wanted to help change things from the inside," says VHC volunteer Fikir Zerai.

When Fikir Zerai left Ethiopia for Lyons, France in 2001 to pursue a dual degree in anthropology and psychology, she wasn't sure where life would take her. After graduating in 2004, she traveled to Canada to begin a master's program in psychopathology and clinical psychology, returning to Lyon where she completed the degree in 2007.

In December of that year, she returned to Ethiopia. "I wanted to see how things were and maybe explore the possibility of staying if the right opportunity presented itself," she explains. That opportunity turned out to be an 11-month Volunteer Healthcare Corps (VHC) placement with JHPIEGO-Ethiopia helping to strengthen pre-service training programs for nurses, midwives, and medical students.

Serving as a link between JHPIEGO staff and partners Addis Ababa University Zerai is providing technical assistance for the creation of an Educational Development Center (EDC).

"Basically, the EDC help to institutionalize quality training programs and ensure that medical field graduates have adequate knowledge and skills, particularly in the area of HIV/AIDS," Zerai says. "Our overall goal is the make sure the university is preparing students to meet the healthcare needs of people today, not 20 years ago," she continues, noting that key elements of her work include helping professors adopt a more interactive, engaging model of teaching.

"Being part of the process to strengthen pre-service education in Ethiopia is very rewarding," Zerai concludes. "I really feel I am making a lasting, positive contribution here."

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