

## Giving Back: VHC Volunteer Yohannes Getachew Offers Technical Assistance to His Homeland

When Yohannes Getachew learned about the Twinning Center's Volunteer Healthcare Corps (VHC) last year through NEPID—the Network of Ethiopian Professionals in the Diaspora—he was immediately interested.

"I've always wanted to work in Ethiopia and thought the VHC would give me an opportunity to do so," says the 45-year-old information technology specialist from Alexandria, Virginia.



VHC volunteer Yohannes Getachew (center) assists ALERT Clinic staff as they input patient records into a database designed to improve case management and reporting related to HIV or AIDS patients.

"I also wanted to learn about the business environment and establish a network of contacts," Getachew continues, explaining that he left Ethiopia when he was 12 to attend school in Kenya. He then attended university in the United States, where he's lived ever since.

The VHC put Getachew's information management and technology skills to good use, placing him with two PEPFAR-supported organizations in Addis Ababa that were looking to develop capacity in those areas. He arrived in his homeland in September 2006 and started working with staff at the Ethiopian Public Health

Association (EPHA) to develop the organization's Web site. He also began working with staff at ALERT Clinic and their partners from Johns Hopkins University to enhance the ARV treatment facility's capacity to collect and analyze patient data.

Getachew accomplished everything he set out to do during his 6-month volunteer assignment, despite some difficulties that are a fact of life in Ethiopia, such as poor Internet connectivity and frequent power outages.

"EPHA is entirely self-sufficient with regard to their Web site," Getachew reports, noting that he is particularly proud of training staff who had no Web design or HTML experience at all prior to his arrival. "Now they can update and maintain the site themselves," he says.

The database project at ALERT Clinic was also successful, according to Getachew. "After implementation, clinic staff were able to generate reports that once took seven days in a matter of minutes," he explains.

The primary purpose of the database was to automate the monthly and cohort reports required by the Ministry of Health, but Getachew says the project yielded

some unintended yet very positive byproducts. "Because the process necessitated a thorough audit of patient records, several hundred errors were caught and corrected," he explains.

Although his VHC assignment was completed in March, Getachew remains in Ethiopia where he is pursuing a business venture. Summing up the experience, he says, "It is very satisfying to know that what seems like such a small effort to me is received with such great appreciation."