

Volunteer's Efforts Build Training Capacity, Improve Quality of HIV Lab Service in Ethiopia



"I can really see the changes I've helped implement and know that I can still contribute so much more. My goal is to ensure these changes are sustainable by focusing on training staff and strengthening lab infrastructure."

**—VHC volunteer
Dr. Wubshet Mamo
(kneeling at center),
with members of the
I-TECH Lab
Support Team**

When Dr. Wubshet Mamo arrived in Addis Ababa in May 2007, the I-TECH HIV laboratory support project he traveled to Ethiopia to assist consisted of one lone technologist.

With his year-long volunteer assignment reaching the half-way mark, the Clinical Laboratory Support Team Mamo helped establish now boasts six dynamic staff members, including four regional coordinators, a senior coordinator, and Mamo himself, who directs the team.

Mamo is part of the Twinning Center's Volunteer Healthcare Corps, an initiative designed to place qualified individuals at organizations supported by PEPFAR that need the long-term, onsite technical assistance a volunteer can provide.

Although he left Ethiopia three decades ago, Mamo says that frequent visits to his homeland made him think that the country could benefit greatly from his knowledge and expertise. "Over the last few years, in particular, I came to realize that my experience could really bring about positive changes," he explains. "That's when I began looking for an opportunity to contribute in some way."

Working closely with Ethiopia's Ministry of Health and I-Tech, Mamo focused on building an expert team capable of supporting field-based clinical laboratory staff and providing mentorship and troubleshooting, which are major challenges in the delivery of effective laboratory services in hospitals and at the regional laboratories.

Thanks to Mamo's expertise as a microbiologist and laboratory specialist, the Support Team can now effectively provide teaching assistance and mentorship to the three regional I-TECH target sites, which includes 35 hospitals, three regional laboratories, and numerous health centers that provide health support services—with a particular focus on ART—to a population of 25 million people.

Mamo has worked very hard to forge a strong relationship between the Lab Support Team and the regional health bureaus—something that did not previously exist. He also collaborated with the Ethiopian Health and Nutrition Research Institute to adopt the national quality control program and strengthen the capacity development of quality control system implementation in all hospital and regional labs at I-TECH target sites.

In addition, Mamo helped staff at the Columbia University-ICAP site Addis Ababa to launch a regional program that enables HIV diagnosis in infants younger than 18 months of age through molecular testing and DNA PCR tests.

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