ETHIOPIA

A New Perspective on Medical Missions

By: Sandra Lodan

Family physicians Maureen Strohm, MD and Noemi "Mimi" Doohan, MD recently returned from volunteer medical mission trips to southern Ethiopia. Unlike missions that only visit remote, underserved outposts where teams must bring their own supplies and equipment, their Ethiopian deployments included time at Adama General Hospital, a beautiful, new, tertiarycare center with highly ranked Ethiopian staff, state-of-the-art equipment, operating rooms, an Intensive Care Unit and key specialty services located in Adama, a modern city.

Dr. Strohm's former University of Southern California/California Hospital colleague and Ethiopia native Gudata S. Hinika, MD created the humanitarian medical program Ethiopia Health Aid (EHA) that organized these mission trips to Adama General Hospital and rural Ethiopia. The nonprofit's mission is to support the creation of healthy, self-sufficient communities in rural Ethiopia, with a guiding principle to provide a mutually beneficial platform for exchanging knowledge and experience between American and Ethiopian medical professionals. The EHA trips were underwritten by Adama General Hospital's owner and general manager Kebir Hussein, who is dedicated to bringing the highest standards of medical care to rural Ethiopia.

Led by Drs. Strohm and Doohan, each respective team included a plastic surgeon, general surgeon, anesthesiologist, nurses, other medical professionals and logisticians. The teams' primary care physicians, surgeons and nurses worked side-by-side with their

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Ethiopian colleagues treating more than 50 patients daily for a wide range of illnesses including hypertension, stroke, diabetes, obesity and liver disease.

Both doctors credit the trips' success to their clear mission — to teach, learn and heal. They further praise EHA's leadership and volunteers along with Adama Hospital's gracious supporters and staff for being well-organized and prepared; creating an atmosphere in which bonds of trust and respect formed quickly; and ensuring the medical mission team's time was spent productively so the mission could be accomplished.

Beyond coming to know and love the Ethiopian people and their culture, the teams learned to "do more with less," which helped them sharpen their diagnostic, clinical and other fundamental medical skills.

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The mission teams also traveled to the rural town of Arsi- Negele in Ethiopia's Lakes Region, where Dr. Hinika is funding construction of a nearly completed district hospital. Deeper into southern Ethiopia's mountains, Dr. Hinika has built a thriving high school in Gode, where he was raised by his grandmother. Future missions will include time providing medical services in Arsi-Negele and Gode.

Drs. Strohm and Doohan count their Ethiopian mission trips among the most rewarding experiences of their lives and look forward to participating in future Ethiopia Health Aid missions.

Dr. Strohm directs the Eisenhower Family Medicine Residency Program and is a clinical associate professor at Keck School of Medicine of USC. Dr. Doohan is the director of the Family Medicine Inpatient Service at Eisenhower Medical Center and serves on the Family Medicine Residency Program faculty. Both doctors are Eisenhower Primary Care 365 physicians with practices based at the Eisenhower George and Julia Argyros Health Center in La Quinta.

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