

Dear friends of Tesfa,

I have recently returned home to Tønsberg after an 8-week trip to Ethiopia. For the first 7 weeks, I was in northern Ethiopia on a mission for the Red Cross, operating on injured patients after the conflict that ended in November 2022. The Red Cross movement does extremely important work in helping victims of armed conflicts. After the civil war in Ethiopia, there were thousands of injured patients on both sides, most of them young. It was heartbreaking to me seeing all the young people who,



*International Committee of the Red Cross*



*I am operating at Ayder Hospital*

months and years after the conflict ended, were still waiting for surgery. Most of them had orthopaedic injuries, but some had very complex gastrointestinal problems. Many of them had fistulas from their intestines, causing the intestinal contents to leak out of different holes in their abdomen. With such injuries, many of the patients become emaciated, making surgery even more challenging. By God's grace, I was able to operate on several of them, thanks to the experience I gained from previous Tesfa trips.

During my stay, I also established contacts with the surgeons at the local hospital, and Tesfa was invited to establish a collaboration agreement with Ayder University Hospital. I think this could be a hospital to which we can send a team in the future.

After completing my stay in northern Ethiopia, I spent 10 days in Addis Ababa, operating mainly at Black Lion Hospital, but also St. Paul Hospital. My first surgeries in Addis this time were due to fistulas around the rectum. Operating in the pelvic area is challenging. In northern Ethiopia, I operated on patients with pelvic injuries due to gunshot wounds, while in Addis, it was primarily due to infections and accidents. The first ones were due to infections. I have been operating with the doctors at Black Lion for several years, and also at St. Paul, and we have been doing mucosal flaps together. Their results are now very good. In Addis, I also joined in an operation where we removed a large tumour from the stomach, a GIST. The tumour was so big that it pushed the stomach and intestines aside; the patient must have been living with it for quite some time.



*CT images of a giant stomach tumor*

I had a weekend in Addis, and we spent time with friends. It was great to see Selam and Gerawork again; we also attended a Scandinavian church service at the Anglican church with the Norwegian Church abroad. As usual, they served us waffles and brown cheese.



*The Norwegian Church abroad is always ready with waffles!*

I say "we" because Olaf was with me in Addis. He arrived on March 3rd and went back home with me on March 12th. The Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) engaged Olaf, and he was working with them, repairing and maintaining a generator. He also visited both Black Lion and St. Paul. But Olaf was not the only one accompanying me this time; we had the joy of having Håvard Djupedal, an anaesthesiologist from Skien!



*Olaf has done maintenance and repair on the generator.*



*The Tesfa team in Addis consisted of Bjarte, Olaf, and Håvard.*

He had already been in Addis for a while with his wife and three children; they had both been working at the Korean hospital as a plastic surgeon and an anaesthesiologist, respectively. Now he had the opportunity to try himself in the Ethiopian public healthcare system at Black Lion.

During our stay, we had discussions with NLM and a meeting with the Norwegian ambassador at the embassy. We had good conversations and shared about the work of both Tesfa and the Red Cross.

The last two days before we left, I had two difficult surgeries, first at St. Paul and then at Black Lion. A young woman had been in a traffic accident with fractures and damage to the anal sphincter and genitals. After surgeries for fractures and wounds, she had a stoma for several months. Then I was able to operate together with the local surgeons, and we were able to repair the damage!

Over the years I have travelled to Africa, I have seen many difficult pelvic injuries due to traffic accidents, gunshot wounds, birth injuries, and injuries caused by cattle horns. These are difficult for the surgeon but especially for the individual patient who may experience faecal and urinary leakage or wounds that do not heal. This is a patient group that I want to help, especially the women with birth injuries. As I gain more experience in these surgeries, I am also operating on more difficult cases.



This experience was particularly useful in northern Ethiopia, where I operated on several patients that other surgeons were hesitant to operate on. *Getting ready to visit the Norwegian Embassy!*

The last surgery in Addis was similar to the last surgery I performed in northern Ethiopia. Both surgeries lasted for several hours, and both involved a hand-sewn connection between the colon and the anus. This is called a pull-through coloanal anastomosis, where we pull the colon through the pelvic floor after removing the mucosa in the rectum before hand-sewing the colon to the anal opening. This technique is rarely used in Norway, but I have performed several in Africa. This technique also carries a high risk of complications and unfortunately, death if an infection in the pelvis develops.

In northern Ethiopia, I operated on a patient with gunshot wounds and damaged rectums. It was the sixth surgery for this patient. The postoperative course went without any complications, and I am so thankful - all glory to God!

In Addis, I operated to reconnect the bowel after previous surgery for rectal cancer. The conventional techniques had already been attempted without success, so we once again performed the pull-through coloanal anastomosis.

After 8 weeks in Ethiopia, I have returned home with gratitude for being able to participate in the work of the Red Cross, which does so much good for the victims of armed conflicts. I am also grateful for the work that the Tesfa Foundation conducts in



Ethiopia, where we are a highly sought-after partner at several hospitals. I am thankful for all of you at home who pray for our work and donate money so that we can travel and help, and in this way, together with you, reflect the love of Jesus.

*'I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'* Matthew 25:36

Best regards,   
Bjarte Tidemann Andersen

Thank you for your support  
that makes this possible.

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Bank account: 3000 2438 093  
IBAN: NO7530002438093  
Sparebanken Sør  
PO Box 200  
N-4662 KRISTIANSAND  
NORWAY  
SWIFT (BIC) SPSONO22