



**JDC-Ethiopia Breaking News:  
12 Ethiopian patients leaving to Mumbai, India this Sunday night for heart surgery at  
SevenHills Hospital**

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**Neima:** At the age of 24, Neima left Ethiopia for Syria to work as a house maid. She began to cook and clean, thoroughly enjoying the adventurous opportunity. But after 7 months, the work became difficult. She tired quickly and couldn't stay on her feet long. On return, Neima was diagnosed with severe mitral stenosis. Now living with her parents and sibs, she works slowly doing roadwork, yearning to return to the Middle East.

One day, Neima met an old friend from her village who told her of an American doctor helping heart patients. Not long after meeting Dr. Rick, she felt hopeful for the first time in years. When asked if she is nervous about going to India, Neima responds with a declarative "No," and smiles as she describes her desire to return to school to help create a better life.



**Anwar:** Graduating high school two years early is a remarkable achievement under the best of circumstances. Anwar Abdullah recently finished at the age of 16, despite being diagnosed with tuberculosis, and asthma, and an undefined heart problem a few years earlier.

While waiting at a hospital to renew a prescription earlier this year, Anwar met a nun from Missionaries of Charity. After describing his story, she immediately phoned Dr. Rick and asked if he could help Anwar. After testing he identified a condition called TAPVR: totally anomalous pulmonary venous return. When he found a high level of oxygen in Anwar's blood, he was confident that this is correctable.

"For as long as I can remember, I had no treatment and no hope," Anwar says. But his serious expression quickly evaporates and in wide smile appears in its place. "I am excited to go to India and am happy for the first time in many years."

Anwar's goal after surgery: to become a cardiologist.



**Ayantu** has been sick nearly her entire life. From the age of one, her mother has been taking her to clinics and hospitals, looking for a cure to what was diagnosed as a hole in her heart: ventricular septal defect. She had to drop out of school due to chest pain and weakness. Her mom, dad, and 3 sisters are very supportive.

With a recent increase in her symptoms, they restarted the search for a cure. Earlier this year, a doctor referred Ayantu to our heart clinic. "I'm really happy" she says with an incredible smile. "I'm going to India to get surgery. Once I am healthy, I am very excited to go back to school, so that I can live a better life and be a doctor."



**Gebremariam:** When Gebremariam was 8 years old, he became very sick. He developed a terrible cough, joint pain and incredible fatigue. After going to a local hospital where they took chest x-rays and ran tests, Gebremariam was diagnosed with rheumatic heart disease, which deformed his mitral valve. Now in his early teens, he has gotten no relief with medications. Too weak to work on his family's farm or go to school, Gebremariam has spent his recent years confined by his heart condition.

Now living in a Catholic mission, he said, "I feel hope. I want to go to school like everyone else so that I can be anything I want to be. I have never been able to work because I have been sick. I am so happy to go to India and when I come back I am excited to go to school for the first time in many years."



**Eyerusalem:** Eyerusalem should be finishing her final year studying accounting at Addis Ababa University. Instead, she spends most of her days at home, under the constant care of her mother and grandmother. About 8 years ago, Eyerusalem began to feel tired and nauseous with a constant pain in her stomach. After going to a local clinic, she was told her symptoms were the result of rheumatic heart disease. She struggled to finish high school.

5 years ago, she suffered a stroke. After some days being paralyzed, she regained her ability to walk, and is now on blood thinners to prevent a recurrence.

Her cousin, a parking lot attendant in Washington, DC, mentioned her condition to Dr. Aziza Shad, a prominent pediatric oncologist originally from Pakistan, who works with Rick on some projects. Dr. Shad mentioned this on a recent trip to Ethiopia. Within an hour, Eyerusalem got an echo, which showed pure mitral stenosis.

"I am so happy for the chance to have surgery in India," says Eyerusalem. "All I want to do is go back to school and study accounting. I hope that I will soon be well enough to finish my degree."



**Yohannes:** Only 7 years after being born, Yohannes has already accumulated a terrifying medical history. Two years ago, at the age of 5, he developed a raging and relentless fever. His dad, a peasant farmer, carried him to the local clinic in the town of Asela only to find out that his son had typhoid and an underlying cardiac condition. Although the fever soon subsided, Yohannes continued to feel tired and lost most of his appetite.

His dad discovered the American doctor working at Missionaries of Charity through several degrees of separation - Dr. Rick's former patient was friendly with a friend of a friend of Yohannes's father. Just 3 months ago he had an echo, confirming Tetralogy of Fallot, a complex

congenital heart disease. He couldn't wait to tell his father about the exciting adventure. "I met a *farenge* (Amharic for foreigner)," Yohannes said. "And then I gave him a hug. He said he would help me. Now I want to be a doctor when I grow up!"



**Andualem** holds impressive professional credentials. At the age of 31, he is a trained welder, carpenter, electrician, cameraman and foreman. But he is now too weak to work and most days cannot summon the strength to leave his uncle's house. 3 years ago he quit his job and went to Black Lion, a local government hospital, seeking relief from chest pain and difficulty breathing. However, despite the very treatable condition with which he was diagnosed, mitral stenosis, no local doctor could perform the necessary procedure.

A few years later, while sitting in the waiting room at Black Lion, Andualem started a conversation with the person sitting next to him. The man happened to be a former cardiac patient of Dr. Rick, and referred him to the Mission. "I was hopeless," Andualem confided, "God is my only chance to live a normal life. All I want is for the suffering to end so that I can do anything and everything I could before. My prayers have been answered."



**Tesfahun's** childhood was as happy as any. He lived with his farmer dad, mom, two brothers and four sisters. He enjoyed going to school, especially playing soccer with his friends. But by the age of 12, his whole world had turned upside down. When Tesfahun began to experience extreme fatigue and his lips turned blue and fingers swelled, his parents brought him to Addis Ababa where he was diagnosed with heart disease. After visiting several hospitals, it became clear that treatment was impossible. Without the necessary capabilities in Ethiopia, Tesfahun has been unable to attend school for the past five years.

Just 6 weeks ago, Tesfahun met a Catholic priest named Marcelo who quickly brought the young boy to the Catholic Mission. He had been diagnosed with untreatable disease, but echo showed that he has Tetralogy and is a good candidate for surgery. After struggling for so many years, it is incredible for things to be moving at such a fast pace. "I very happy and not afraid to be going to India for surgery," says Tesfahun. "Once I am healthy all I want to do is study so that I can be a doctor."



**Zewdie** has survived with rheumatic heart disease well into her 30s; many people do not make it that far. She has been sick for years, and has been nursed through many episodes of heart failure by her mother. She had to withdraw before she could graduate from high school. Numerous hospital visits were not helpful

She met nuns in her hometown of Goba who referred her to Addis Ababa for evaluation. After 2 decades of suffering, she now has a chance of definitive treatment.

"I am very happy to be going to India," she told us. "After my surgery I want to do everything I have not been able to do all these years."



**Mussaa** was getting progressively weaker in his native village in the Somali area of Ethiopia, due to rheumatic heart disease. He was forced to drop out of school. He went to a local Catholic mission, and was referred to our mission in Addis Ababa, accompanied by an older brother.

He was started on medication for his heart failure, but developed a blood clot in his heart, which could lead to a stroke. Dr. Rick started him on blood thinners, and he has stabilized. This week he said, "For years it has been hard to eat and sometimes I cannot stop coughing. I miss my family, my 3 brothers, my 2 sisters, and my parents. I am excited to go to India where they can help, so I can go home, see my friends, and go back to school again."



22 year old **Lidya** started to cough up blood at the age of 12. Her mom brought her from the countryside to Addis Ababa, where mitral stenosis was diagnosed. In a waiting room at a clinic, someone told her about our program. Noting on exam that she had pure mitral stenosis (which can be treated with a balloon procedure), she was immediately accepted for treatment abroad. "I had been going to the university hospital for years without hope," she told us recently, "now I am confident that I have a chance at a real future."



**Kidist** joins this group courtesy of Reader's Digest. Reader's Digest? A church in Alaska read an article about Dr. Rick, and later contacted him and asked if he could help this girl, and promised funding. Kidist, 14, was diagnosed with heart failure from rheumatic heart disease 4 years ago. When she does not feel well, her mom carries her to school, so that she will not fall behind. Her dad has died and her mom works in a local church. Indian doctors have said she is a high-risk patient, but certainly surgery to replace her mitral valve is her only hope at a long life.