

Collaboration between McGill Department of Surgery, Canadian Network for International Surgery (CNIS) and Ethiopia continues as it has for the past decade. Several McGill surgeons have contributed substantively to International Surgery teachings in Ethiopia for more than 15 years and helped establish CNIS, which is now the largest surgical development organization in the world.



McGill, CNIS and Ethiopia

By Ronald Lett, M.D.

Retired McGill surgeon Dr. Peter McLean practiced at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal from 1966-2005. He worked in Ethiopia as part of the Surgical Amendment to the McGill Ethiopia Community Health Project, teaching Essential Surgical Skills (ESS[©]) on several occasions and distributed a container of surgical books for CNIS in Ethiopia in 2006. Dr. McLean was one of the founding directors of CNIS, chair in 1997 and an honorary life member since 1998.

Dr. Antoine Loutfi, associate professor in the departments of Surgery and Oncology at McGill, started a surgical program in Ethiopia as part of McGill Ethiopia Community Health Project. The former CNIS Board member spent three years in Ethiopia on the project. In addition, Dr. Loutfi developed a program to train general practitioners in surgical emergencies. During his Ethiopia stay, he was joined by Dr. Peter McLean, Dr. John Oliver, a urologist, and visiting surgeons, Dr. Marvin Wexler as an external examiner and Dr. Ronald Lett as an evaluator. Dr. Lett, current President of CNIS, has continued his McGill connection as adjunct professor of surgery for 12 years. The surgeons helped in the training of residents in the Addis Ababa University program in general surgery.

Dr. Jonathan Meakins, Emeritus Professor at McGill, visited Ethiopia while Chief of the Department of Surgery at McGill. He became an honorary life member of CNIS in 2002 for his contributions to its early years. Dr. Robert Taylor, CNIS Surgical Associate, is also a McGill Medical School Alumni (1970).

Dr. Tarek Razek, director of the Trauma Program at McGill University Health Centre has taught ESS in Ethiopia, served on the board of CNIS since 2004 and has been board chair since 2008.

Dr. Razek and other McGill surgeons have been active in bringing the programs developed in Ethiopia to Tanzania. With surgical trainees at the time – Simon Bergman and Dan Deckelbaum (both of whom have returned as staff surgeons at McGill), Dr. Razek participated in the ongoing relationship and research activities with the teams in Dar es Salaam.

CNIS has been teaching surgical obstetrical and trauma care skills in Ethiopia for the last 14 years and has built 5 surgical skills lab there. CNIS' ESS course and the obstetrical-surgical learning centers were both developed and tested in Ethiopia. Ethiopia has been an important site for the innovations CNIS has established throughout east and southern Africa and recently introduced to West Africa.



Dr. Tarek Razek, Director of the Trauma Program at The McGill University Health Centre and CNIS Board Chair.

Ethiopia has a population of 80 million (2005), growth of 2.5 %, and a fertility rate of 5.8 births per woman. The life expectancy at birth is 50.7, maternal mortality ratio 720/100,000 live births, 6% of births have skilled attendants and there are 3 physicians per 100,000. There is generally poor health status of women and children. Ethiopia's Ministry of Health emphasizes the need to train trainers and provide continuing education to health care professionals.

CNIS conducts regular surgical courses in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital. The Addis Ababa Obstetrical and Surgical Learning Center has been expanded into a national training center and the CNIS has an office in the skills lab in Addis from which African CNIS projects are implemented.

The organization hopes to name a new surgical skills centre in Addis Ababa after McGill and hence strengthen the ties between the Canadian University and the surgical teaching centre in Addis. ♦

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