

# Reflections from Jo Middlemiss in Ethiopia with the Medical Project

## Buccama Week 1

'The Clinic is going great guns with many many people coming in for both UVP and Podoconiosis Treatment.

About 50 women and about 75 men women and children. Some of the stories are heart rending and some are worth rejoicing.

A woman with a contracted leg came in on crutches and Maureen with healing hands massage has got her walking again. Very exciting. A little boy with a swollen leg has also responded to physio and antibiotics. He has become like a mascot and is charging around now running errands and doesn't want to go home!

The Podo cases are a different story. Heartbreakingly huge and distorted feet which need weeks and months of treatment but they plod in faithfully everyday for soaking and soaping and massage. We handed out 50 pairs of new shoes to day but we couldn't buy enough big sizes for many of them.

The clinic could become a victim of its own success as the people are coming in from far beyond the catchment area. All this costs money and they are anxious about not having enough for all they are trying to do.

We are working on a plan.

The sisters and staff continue to inspire us. Come 5 pm the staff don their Scottish football tops and play volley ball till dusk.

Today a terrific your Obs and Gyn Dr came and spent the day with us. Running the UVP clinic and giving us great tips.

We are well and as ever happy to be here seeing all your generosity put to good use.

## **Buccama Week 2**

As the Mossy Foot Clinic is growing in reputation, people are flowing in from well out with our jurisdiction. This is good as well as complicated. We have done some strenuous bartering for the strong plastic shoes in the market which only seem to go up to size 43 when hugely swollen and bandaged feet need a different type of shoe. The majority however are happy with standard size and there cannot be a better way to spend a pound. It is very hard to clean feet here. The red dust is everywhere and seems to stick. As I have no nail brush here, I set to on my own feet with an old tooth brush. It struck us that if each person had a tooth brush to clean their feet and toes it would be more effective than the scraps of gauze which they are using now. It's novel but it might work.

We are loving how involved the staff have become in the work as the stigma has fallen away. Now the people are arriving at 8 am where the guards have already filled the buckets with water ready for the foot washing. First come first served. Very gratifying. There is a rhythm to the weeks and days. Today is Tuesday. Yesterday was hectic all day, today is quieter and virtually nothing happens in the afternoon as its market day somewhere near. We are actually resting as it is so hot. Tomorrow will be busy again and Thursday we take the Mothers to be operated on, off to hospital. Our American Dr friends have just completed their 200nd prolapse operation for us. Quite a record. The majority of women though are delighted with the pessaries as they have been life changers for so many.

### **Buccama Week 3**

Now the time starts to rush by as our time for leaving approaches. The business side of things has to be discussed with Ethiopia EMP Committee. How are the EMP funds used and dispersed and how will they keep going for another year? Sister Haimanot and Tariku, her right hand man, detail for us the cost of medicine, stationary supplies, soap, disinfectant, car maintenance, food for waiting mothers and inpatients etc. It all adds up to considerably more than the basic salaries of the 20 plus staff members. Fantastic as it is to be part of the work of the clinic, and humbling as it is to be part of changing attitudes towards prolapse and podoconiosis, it is also a very sobering responsibility to have so many people dependent on us for survival, never mind socks, shoes and pessary rings. (We haven't yet met a single Ethiopian who had ever heard of this simple little life changing circle of polyurethane.)

We had to talk about sustainability, local partner contributions and the constant search for a significant major donor or two who could help us beyond our own contribution.

Monday Feb 11 th: After an emotional farewell, we are now in a little retreat centre, one hour out from Addis, million dollar fighter planes are flying over us in practice drills and Sister is just off the phone saying that 80 people had turned up for the Podo clinic this morning. 80 people without decent footwear, soap or water, the irony is not lost on us. The work goes on.

We are missing them all already. But we are also missing all of you and it's time to come home.