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## CALENDAR

February/March 2016  
Thanh Hoa, Vietnam

October 2016  
Hermosillo, Mexico  
Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

January 2017  
Harbel, Liberia

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## Teamwork and Collaboration – Blazing a New Trail in Ethiopia

**“The way you people work together, the way you are a team, the way you work together with our people, the way you help our people. It is a gift.”**

– Dr. Melesse Gebeyehu, urologist

This winter, CSI completed its first mission to Ethiopia. This mission was as unique and special as the country itself, thanks to our new partnership with Dr. Woubeshet Ayenew, cardiologist at Hennepin County Medical Center. CSI teams were in two Ethiopian cities concurrently, performing craniofacial, urologic and cardiac surgeries and providing critical education, training and mentoring to local physicians, nurses and families. Dr. Ayenew not only led the cardiac team in Addis Ababa, he was key to our overall success in making connections and building relationships.

In Addis Ababa, the cardiology team evaluated 22 patients with severe rheumatic heart disease, then chose and prioritized them for interventions over the course of their two-week stay. Sticking with the CSI mission, the team goals included training and knowledge transfer at all levels of the cardiac care model, including hands-on training, lectures for medical students, residents and fellows, and specific cardiac seminars for nurses. And since rheumatic heart disease is so common in Ethiopia, the CSI team was able to learn from the local expertise about disease management.

In Bahir Dar, the team spent the week at The Felege Hiwot University Hospital, the city's public hospital which serves hundreds of thousands from around the region. The night before starting surgeries, CSI hosted a wonderful dinner where CSI and Ethiopian nursing, anesthesia and surgical staff were all seated together to make important connections. These early interactions helped maximize their time together to successfully complete 23 ENT and 13 urology surgeries and share as much knowledge as possible. In fact, in several cases, Ethiopian surgeons – armed with new knowledge – were able to perform surgeries with only coaching support from CSI volunteers.

This was a great feeling for everyone involved. In addition to training for physicians, CSI nursing volunteers worked side-by-side with Ethiopian nurses to teach them about medication dosing, post-surgical care and much more.

**“I have the opportunity this week to learn from a surgeon who is absolutely extraordinary, more extraordinary than I could have ever imagined.”**

– Dr. Melesse Gebeyehu



CSI OR nurse Mary Johnson with a happy patient.



CSI Drs. Johnson, Ayenew, Kanda and Ethiopian partner Dr. Bekele Alemayehu with a young cardiology patient.



CSI PACU nurse Molly McIntyre conducting nursing education.

Continued on next page...



*Continued from front page*

When asked about the long-term impact of the CSI visit to Ethiopia, Drs. Melesse Gebeyehu and Asnake Bitew highlighted three things:

1. There are now certain surgeries they are able to do that they wouldn't have attempted before. One such surgery was already scheduled for the next week.
2. Drs. Asnake and Melesse will keep up the momentum and continue to train the other doctors with whom they practice.
3. Finally, and perhaps most notably, Dr. Melesse talked of being awestruck watching how our CSI team works together. He is excited to implement practice model changes that will help the Ethiopian medical teams function more cohesively, thus improving each patient's experience and continuum of care.

In addition to serving children and families in dire need, the Ethiopia mission is special because the local physicians, nurses and other



*CSI pediatrician Dr. Paul Melchert doing a screening with a family.*

providers are committed and enthusiastic about learning to ultimately perform these surgeries independently. Plans are already underway to return in the fall to continue this wonderful new partnership.

## Megan Sparks, MA, OTR/L

### CSI's New Executive Director

Children's Surgery International is pleased to introduce Megan Sparks as Executive Director. As we focus on delivering life-changing medical care through more missions as well as increasing our focus on providing in-country education and training, now is the perfect time expand our staff team.



"What an amazing time to become Executive Director at CSI. In my first week I had the pleasure of seeing the Ethiopia team off, meeting the full Board of Directors, supporting the Gala planning team, and preparing for the Vietnam team departure. Reading the blog updates from Ethiopia has been so inspiring. It's like two missions in one with two locations and three surgical specialties, and what an incredible first trip. With each update my excitement grew. I am so proud to be a part of this dedicated team doing amazing work to change lives and strengthen communities in need around the world."

Megan is an accomplished leader and occupational therapist with extensive experience in healthcare access, rehabilitation, social services and nonprofit management. Most recently she was a senior director at the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Megan is especially interested in clinical outreach and education, community engagement, strategic planning, program development and impact assessment. She has a B.S. in psychology from Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa, and an M.A. in occupational therapy from St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Megan lives in Minneapolis with her husband, two children and one Alaskan Malamute. As the mother of a child with special needs, Megan understands firsthand the need for access to essential and life-changing medical care and is thrilled to join the CSI team.

## STORIES OF HOPE

### Seid, a farmer, hopes to go to professional school

Seid, a 26-year-old Ethiopian man, came to us hoping we could help him with urinary incontinence that had plagued him for quite some time. Seid is a farmer and in the 10th grade, hoping to go on to professional school. He traveled more than 250 km seeking care. A specialized tool called a cystoscope was needed to make an accurate diagnosis. After a few phone calls, Dr. Melesse, our Ethiopian urologist, was able to borrow one. The team evaluated and repaired the problem. CSI and Ethiopian surgeons worked side by side so that the transfer of knowledge would allow this kind of care to continue long after CSI teams return home.



### The strength of parent-child bonds

The bonds between parent and child are the same around the world. This adoring father is the primary caretaker for his son, whose mother suffers from a serious mental health illness. After walking nearly 100 km and riding the bus another 50 km, the two of them arrived at the hospital to learn that the CSI surgical teams would be able to repair the baby's cleft lip. The father spent five hours rocking and walking to comfort his very hungry boy before his cleft lip surgery.

## Katie Houle Reflects on 2015 Vietnam Mission

by Reed Fischer

Katie Houle and her team touched down in Vietnam unsure of what to expect. Katie was part of the first Children's Surgery International mission group to travel to Vietnam. How would they be received, and how would this trip be different from Katie's previous missions with CSI?

Almost immediately, it became clear to her that the mission wouldn't be much different at all. Yes, the language was different and the faces were different—but the love, kindness and appreciation they received from the people of Vietnam were the same. In her time in Vietnam, Katie met countless parents who had waited for weeks to be seen by CSI, parents who absolutely adored their children.

One of the most crucial parts of the mission for Katie and her team was teaching about 60 local nursing and anesthesia students basic health care and treatment. For her, this was also one of the most rewarding parts of the trip. "Working side by side with the locals and explaining why we do what we do is a huge part of these missions and of CSI. It's a gift for both sides to see their progress," Katie said. "We taught them the essentials, like CPR, but we also spent time showing them how to take care of the patients after surgery." This teaching ensures that the children will still be in capable hands long after CSI finishes the mission.

Katie spent most of her days keeping the children relaxed before their operations. "I had the best job, really. I got to play with the kids and their parents. A lot of the parents and kids are really nervous about the operation, and I got to help them keep their minds off of things." Experiences like these help Katie excel in her nursing job at Gillette Children's Hospital back home in Minnesota. "Being a part of CSI and having these experiences makes me a better nurse every day."



By the end of the nine-day mission, Katie could not have been more proud of the work CSI had done in Vietnam. "We got done and I looked at all these happy, healthy patients, and then I looked at all these exhausted friends and coworkers who made it happen," Katie said. "I'm always in awe that we can do it. It really speaks to the kinds of people who do this work." In all, Katie and the rest of the team improved the lives of more than 50 children.

Katie has been volunteering with CSI for more than eight years. She has been on multiple missions with CSI, including trips to Peru in 2008, Liberia in 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013, and this latest trip to Vietnam in 2015. She plans to return to Vietnam in the fall of 2016 to continue the work she and her team began last year.

### Optimism against all odds

Thuong is a 42-year-old woman from rural Vietnam with a severe facial deformity. She stopped attending school in 2nd grade after being brutally mocked by her classmates. Thuong gestured to the CSI team that she had worked in the rice fields since she was 3 feet tall. She is able to read only five or six words, but has learned to write her name. Even before the surgery, Thuong's smile was beautiful. Her personality, with plenty of giggles, shone through. Thuong's surgical repair was a success, and she will be followed by local health professionals for continued care and support.



### Eternally grateful in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, a father brought his young son to be evaluated by the CSI team for cleft palate surgery. The family lives in Bahir Dar and heard about CSI's surgical mission from a neighbor who is a nurse. The family raises goats, which may sell for 500-1000 birr, the equivalent of 25-50 USD. They were incredibly grateful to receive free surgical care for their child.





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**You can also make a donation online at**

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## **CSI Makes Second Trip to Vietnam**

The CSI team in Thanh Hoa, Vietnam, includes 26 members from Minnesota, Virginia, California, North Dakota, Tennessee and Maryland.

As this newsletter goes to press, CSI volunteers just completed this mission, doing 56 surgeries and working alongside hospital surgeons, physicians, nurses and administrators every step of the way to provide life-changing medical care for children and families as well as education and training for the local health professionals.

**“Our team is enthusiastic, resourceful, hardworking, committed, and fun! CSI is thrilled to have a few nurses and physicians with us in Vietnam who are new to CSI. It really doesn't take long for a group of passionate people to become a cohesive team.**

**The children and families waiting for us here gave us the energy and focus to give them our best.”**

*- Linda Sedgwick, RN, PNP  
(CSI board member)*

