



Changing Systems to Changing Lives: Aster's Story

Aster Amanuel lives in Debre Markos town 190 miles away from the capital Addis Ababa. She is a 70-year-old mother of four and grandmother of two. Her two granddaughters Emuye, 6 and Blen, 8 live with her.

On a trip back from visiting family in Addis 20 years ago, Aster felt ill and went to the nearest health center to find out what was wrong. Doctors said her sugar level was critically high and she needed to start treatment right away. For the past 12 years, Aster has been on Insulin.

Aster and her family go to Debre Markos Hospital for all their health care needs. She goes there once a month for checkups and to refill her prescription. Debre Markos Hospital is a public facility which gives service to 3.5 million people in and around Debre Markos. Aster says she is happy with the services she gets at the hospital; but that was not always the case.

‘A few years ago, I felt anxious when I was about to go to the hospital because that would mean I have to spend more than half the day, and sometimes all day there because waiting time was so long,’ Aster says, ‘and after lining up outside for a long time in the sun or rain, I might not even get my prescription filled because the pharmacy has run out of Insulin.’

Availability of essential medicines and quality of service in pharmacies in Ethiopia have been recognized as critical problems by the Federal Ministry of Health. In 2011, the USAID-funded Systems for Improved Access to Pharmaceuticals and Services (SIAPS) Program, implemented by Management Sciences for Health, collaborated with the Federal Ministry of Health and Regional Health Bureaus to develop a way to improve the quality of pharmaceutical services. The Auditable Pharmaceutical Transactions and Services (APTS), a package of interventions, is the result of this collaboration.

APTS was piloted in Debre Markos Hospital and showed unprecedented success. In a short time, availability of essential medicines increased while expiry and wastage decreased. The pharmacy premises was remodeled from where people lined up outside of a grilled window to receive counselling and medication, to a walk-in pharmacy with wider space where counselling could be carried out unhurried and confidential. The remodeling also contributed to a significant decrease in waiting time.

‘We live on a retirement stipend I get from the government,’ Aster says, ‘I can hardly afford to buy medicines from private pharmacies. I don’t have to do that now since in the last five years I haven’t been turned away from the hospital. I always go home with my medicine.’



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“These changes at the hospital mean so much to me. I’m blessed to have lived to see them”

- Aster Desalegn

Aster now spends less than two hours on her monthly visits to the hospital leaving her enough time to go back home to make lunch and rest before her granddaughters come back from school. ‘These changes at the hospital mean so much to me. I’m blessed to have lived to see them,’ Aster says with a broad smile.

After seeing the results brought about by APTS at Debre Markos Hospital, the Federal Ministry of Health and Regional Health Bureaus developed an APTS regulation with the ultimate goal of implementing it in all health facilities in the country. To date, more than 70 health facilities have implemented APTS with scale-up progressing fast.



Aster Ammanuel (second from right) has more time to spend with her family now that the time needed for her visits to the hospital has decreased.

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